

WIOA State, Regional and Local Plan Guidance

for 2024-2027

PREPARED BY THE GOVERNOR'S WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD

Regional Plan Template

SECTION A: REGIONAL VISION, GOALS AND STRATEGIES

A.1. Describe the regional workforce development area's vision for a skilled workforce.

Regional Workforce Development Area #5 has adopted the state's vision as our own. The strategic vision for Regional Workforce Development Area #5 (South Central and Southwest Minnesota) is a healthy economy where all Minnesotans have equitable access to a workforce development system in which partners across the region are working toward a collective goal of providing workforce development programs that are responsive to employer needs in in-demand occupations and lead to good jobs with family-sustaining wages.

A.2. Describe the region's strategic alignment with the State's Vision, Goals and Strategies.

Workforce Development Area #5 Regional Plan is strategically aligned with the State's Vision, Goals and Strategies while also addressing the unique needs and priorities of the region. The Region has adopted the State's vision, and the Regional Goals and Strategies also support the State's Plan. Region #5 Workforce Development Goals are:

1. Increase high school student's understanding of and exposure to regional occupations in demand.

Minnesota has a shortage of school counselors as shown by a student to school counselor ratio of 544-to-1 in the 2022-2023 school year. This is the third highest in the nation. The American School Counselor Association recommends a 250-to-1 ratio, and the national average is 385-to-1. This shortage is especially evident in smaller, rural school districts. There is a need to support school districts with career counseling services and work-based learning opportunities. In addition, a new study released by the Center of Rural Policy and Development showed that only 25% of high school students who graduated in southwest Minnesota had meaningful employment in southwest Minnesota 6 years after graduating from college. Career and technical education and work-based learning opportunities were shown in the study to increase worker retention. With a significant regional labor shortage, it is imperative to create opportunities such as career awareness and career exploration events, business tours, business speakers in the classroom, job shadows, internships, and other work-based learning opportunities for students to learn about the great employers and jobs in the area. This was one of the top goals prioritized by employers and stakeholders at our Workforce Development Forums and Surveys.

2. Expand the number of skilled workers through sector-based career pathway approaches in key industries.

This goal was another priority identified by employers and stakeholders at the Forums and through the surveys. It greatly aligns with the State's goal to "Build employer-led industry-sector partnerships across the state to create or expand responsive and equitable workforce development programs and career pathways with embedded work-based learning or on-the-job training, including Registered Apprenticeships, focused on closing gaps in participation and representation based on race, ethnicity, disability, gender, veteran status, and age." Region #5 develops and implements sector-based career pathway programming with local partners focused on in-demand, quality occupations. Key industries include Agriculture, Construction, Education, Health Care and Social Assistance, IT, Manufacturing, and Transportation and Warehousing.

3. Provide training and assistance to help businesses retain and attract the diverse workforce they need now and into the future.

"The number of jobs held by minorities has more than doubled in southwest Minnesota since 2000 when people of color held 6% of jobs (DEED Regional Profile)." Demographic reports show that population growth in the region is coming from new immigrants moving to the area. The need for employers to create inclusive and welcoming places of work is essential. Expert trainers, best practices highlighted, and individual support provided will assist employers in developing and implementing plans to retain and attract a diverse workforce, promote quality jobs, and create inclusive work environments.

This goal also aligns well with the State Plan to "Create a more inclusive, equitable, accessible, and proactive workforce system to serve all Minnesotans, preparing employers and the current and emerging workforce for the changing nature of work including new and emerging technology, changing labor market demands, and for the state's shifting demographics, including our new Minnesotans."

- A.3. Describe best practices or area of strength of the region as it relates to the State's Vision, Goals and Strategies that should be considered for replication or scale across the state.

Regional Workforce Development Area #5 is known for its partnerships and collaboration with colleges, Adult Basic Education, school districts, service cooperatives, CAP agencies, community-based organizations, tribal nations, Initiative Foundations, Regional Development Commissions, economic development, chambers, trade unions, and employers. This has been demonstrated through a decade of delivering successful

career pathway programming including the MAWB #1 Promising Practice awards in 2021 for the Community Interpreter Training Program and in 2022 for the Construction Training in partnership with the Lower Sioux Indian Community. Regional partnerships have won many other awards through the years.

Partners are adept at making cross-referrals, creating a “no wrong door” approach, and helping job seekers access the resources they need to succeed. We also partner on numerous regional events targeting youth, new Americans, service providers, and/or employers.

- A.4. Describe the strategy to work with the entities within your region to carry out the core programs to align resources available in the region to achieve the strategic vision and goals of the local area boards and the state.

Region 5’s strategy to align resources and achieve the strategic vision and goals starts with a comprehensive assessment of local workforce needs. This is the basis for the board’s strategic goals. In partnership, we work to align WIOA core programs and key stakeholders to create a coordinated approach to provide training and services, facilitate outreach, and address unmet needs. Data is used to inform decisions and measure impact. Regular meetings and feedback sessions keep work moving forward and provide continuous improvement opportunities.

Key partnerships with our Regional Development Commissions provide alignment of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy with the Regional Workforce Development Plan. Additionally, we partner with the college and service cooperative to align the Perkins Plan with the WIOA Youth Plan. This alignment facilitates coordinated joint initiatives and innovation in addressing our local needs.

- A.5. Describe any additional goals being set by the regional leadership or individual local area boards.

An additional goal is to optimize the newly legislated North Star Promise for workforce development. As Minnesota residents will now be able to access free tuition, we will be adopting and adjusting our employment and training programs to utilize these additional resources to further build out a comprehensive continuum of employment and training services resulting in increased employment outcomes. A focus will be on promoting more learn and earn program models.

- A.6. Describe how the region is working together to prepare the workforce for state and federal investments in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), the Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors (CHIPS) and Science Act, and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) (collectively referred to as Investing in America (IIA)).

Our partnership with DEED, the Regional Development Commissions, and local economic development professionals will be key to understanding how the legislation impacts on our local area and the workforce needs that result from it. As we become aware of new projects, we will allocate resources and convene stakeholders to address any skilled labor shortages. Clean energy projects of wind, solar, and transmission lines are currently being discussed in southwest Minnesota. Our community and technical colleges have related programs, and we are currently assessing the workforce needs.

SECTION B: REGIONAL OPERATIONS

- B.1. Provide a Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats (SWOT) analysis of the regional workforce system.

The RWDA #5 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis was completed through a Workforce Summit in Southwest MN and two Workforce Development Forums in Southwest and South Central Minnesota. There were approximately 40 participants at each of the three events that included a mix of private sector employers, education, community partners, economic development representatives and other stakeholders. Attendees heard from MN DEED Labor Market Analysts on demographics and workforce conditions in the regions. Executive Directors from the respective regions provided a summary of the current workforce strategies. Both Southwest and South Central MN contracted with Cheryl K. Glaeser with Achieve Consulting as a neutral facilitator to gather insights from stakeholders to inform the regional WIOA plan and help establish regional priorities. The methods used and insights gathered were collectively themed and results of key findings are described below.

Strengths

Forum attendees were asked to identify what is working well in the region. Notable strengths included:

- Targeting and providing **career exposure to high school students**. Last year, over 15,329 students from 87 school districts received career services in RWDA #5 including career events, labor market information, career exploration, career planning, post-secondary information, job search assistance, business tours, job shadows, and information on CareerForce services available.
- Vast **work-based learning opportunities** for students and adults seeking to enter the workforce, noting specifically the opportunity to create advanced partnerships between

- employers and high school students. Work-based learning opportunities include work experiences, internships, On-The-Job Training programs (hands-on instruction completed at work to learn core competencies necessary to succeed in an occupation), Incumbent Worker Training programs (up-skilling designed to ensure that employees of a company can acquire the skills necessary to remain employed and/or advance within the company).
- Comprehensive **Adult Career Pathway** programming to eliminate the barriers contributing to economic disparities by supporting adult learners to increase their basic skills, provide work readiness skills training, attainment of industry related certificates for in-demand occupations that will lead to employment opportunities and advanced training options.
 - **Partnerships** with Career and Technical Education (CTE) including secondary education, post-secondary education and CTE legislative initiatives through LYFT in Southwest and Future Ready CTE in South Central. As well as partnerships with employers and school districts. The dual goal of connecting students to local post-secondary institutions and local employers is best achieved when CTE programs attract students to fields that support local jobs in local industries.

Weaknesses

Forum attendees were asked to identify what could be improved in the region. Notable weaknesses included:

- **Expanded Efforts to Increase Student Awareness and Skills** - Participants noted a desire to expand efforts to increase student and family awareness of local careers/jobs and encourage more skills-based training in high schools.
- **Preparing Employers for a Non-traditional Workforce** - Participants noted the opportunity to assist employers with understanding the non-traditional workforce, noting the desire for more flexible scheduling and part-time opportunities.
- **Assisting Employers with DEI barriers** by providing training and resources to create inclusive environments that attract a diverse workforce.
- **Business Assistance** including finding skilled workers; work-based learning; job promotion/application process; how to engage in high school programs.
- **Advocate for Changes in Education** Participants discussed the need to advocate for changes in our education system, noting changes education may face with technology advancements such as Artificial Intelligence, remote-learning, limited electives with graduation requirements.

Opportunities

Several opportunities for addressing workforce challenges through new/additional strategies emerged in survey responses and forum discussions. Those most noted were as follows:

Advancing Employer and Education Partnerships to Provide Work Experiences/Learning

Numerous participants noted the opportunity to engage employers in work-based learning opportunities for students and adults. Specific ideas that emerged included:

- Helping students and teachers better understand the world of work by offering more work experiences and work-based learning (school/work programs in addition to advanced CTE).
- Promoting “real” jobs in the region through business presentations, tours at area high schools/colleges, etc.
- Bringing core and career and technical education (CTE) teachers and employers together for better alignment of learning with workplace skills. For example, helping students meet graduation requirements through work-based learning (e.g. Algebra through a Manufacturing Internship).

Alleviating Barriers to Employment

- Classes to assist individuals with obtaining a Driver’s License
- Assisting with transportation needs (taxi’s, busing, etc.) especially for evening jobs/classes
- Helping employers adapt to and prepare for demographic changes (creating inclusive, welcoming cultures)

Threats

When asked to identify key influencers of regional priorities for the next four years, survey respondents identified leading influencers; workforce shortage, skills gap, and limited awareness of local careers. In addition, growing cultural diversity, youth out-migration (leaving the region after high school), and retirements were noted to a slight/moderate extent. Forum participants also noted the lack of available workers and skills mismatch challenges. Southwest and South Central MN continue to experience low unemployment with Mankato as the second lowest in the nation compared to other Metropolitan Statistical Areas. In addition, our region is showing lower labor force projections for 25–44-year olds, which will tighten an already short supply of workers. Population growth for the region is largely due to foreign born populations indicating the need for employers to diversify their workforce as a viable strategy to meet workforce needs.

Forum participants were asked to identify the ways in which labor market, workforce trends and influencers might shape or impact workforce strategies. Participants noted the following:

- A need to better understand the barriers to entering the workforce in the region, noting potential barriers as changes in individual work preferences, childcare costs/availability, and housing. It also noted that interest in part-time work has increased due to rising childcare costs with parents sharing care and work responsibilities.
- The need to advance student awareness of regional/technical jobs, promote and encourage 2-yr college opportunities, and advance technical skills for students.
- The opportunity to tap into non-traditional workers and/or become more efficient and productive with lower numbers of employees.
- The opportunity to help workers acquire technical skills, specifically noting opportunities for underserved populations and workers seeking to advance/up-skill.

- The need to advocate for policy changes related to graduation standards. The North Star Promise was discussed, with concerns shared that it may harm 2-year colleges/programs and exacerbate the workforce shortages in rural areas.

In summary, the SWOT analysis identified the following workforce strategies:

- Increase **work-based learning** opportunities for high school/college students and adults.
- Support **employer-education engagement** to better align education/skills and promote regional careers.
- Offer **employer/employee training** on changing workplace dynamics and provide short-term training for needed skills.
- Identify true **barriers to employment** and help alleviate those barriers. Potential barriers noted were childcare, housing, language, and transportation.
- **Support employers** in hiring under-represented populations and creating welcoming environments for all.
- **Promote regional careers to all** – students, families, and to people beyond the region.

- B.2. Describe the selection process for the membership who will provide the leadership to oversee the development and coordination of the regional plan.

The Southwest MN Workforce Development Board (LWDA 6) and the South Central WorkForce Council (LWDA 7) entered into a Memorandum of Understanding to provide oversight of the development and coordination of regional planning. The Regional Leadership Team is comprised of the Chair and Vice Chair of each of the Local Elected Officials Boards; the Chair and Vice Chair of each of the LWDA Boards; the LWDA directors and supporting staff. The Regional Leadership Team has the responsibility to understand the workforce development needs, establish priorities for resources based on these needs, set goals and metrics to report on results and communicate strategies developed to address the identified needs.

- B.3. Describe how the selected organizations from the region will provide oversight to development and implementation of the regional plan. Complete Attachment A - Regional Oversight Committee

The Regional Leadership Team agrees to the following:

- Review labor market and economic information about the region, including identification and status of strategic industries, as well as employer and jobseeker needs.
- Explore opportunities to share resources and to seek additional resources (including leveraging state and federal funds) to meet mutually identified needs of employers and jobseekers in the region.

- Organize and create a regional vision that is employer-driven based on industry needs, identify lead industry and regional partnerships (champions), and create solutions based on those needs.
- Collaborate with Workforce System partners, e.g. Adult Education and Literacy, Career and Technical Education, Wagner-Peyser, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, higher education, and other community partners.
- Follow the provisions for the Regional Planning process set forth in WIOA, Section 106 (c)(1), as follows:
 - Establish regional service strategies, including cooperative agreements.
 - Develop and implement sector initiatives for in-demand industry sectors/occupations.
 - Collect and analyze regional labor market data.
 - Establish administrative cost arrangements, as appropriate, for the region.
 - Coordinate transportation and other support services, as appropriate, for the region.
 - Coordinate services with regional economic development providers.

B.4. Describe how the approach used will ensure that partner engagement includes diverse representation, specifically among populations experiencing barriers to employment.

The Southwest Minnesota Private Industry Council and the South Central WorkForce Council and its partners have committed to and embedded equity and inclusion into the fabric of our organization and it is reflected in our outcomes. We strive to provide person-centered, culturally responsive services that are accessible to all and welcome and treat all people with dignity and respect. Our core strategies to address equity include increasing the diversity reflected on our boards and staff; growing in our understanding and implementation of best DEI practices; being data-driven and intentional in our outreach to historically marginalized communities; and increase the number of BIPOC to explore careers, earn industry recognized credentials, and gain marketable experience in high-demand, high-pay occupations, including non-traditional careers. We deliver services in a **cultural responsive** way through: 1) a commitment from leadership and the board; 2) reflecting this priority in our mission, values, structure, strategic goals, policies, and practices; 3) ensuring all program participants feel valued, programming that builds on their strengths, and translation or interpretation services being available; 4) having a diverse board and staff; 5) engaging ethnic communities in the planning and implementation of services; 6) facilitating equity and inclusivity training for board and staff; and 7) through personal performance measures that include skills related cultural responsive programming.

The representation from BIPOC communities in our board, committees and staff is 20% more than the population as a whole and includes Black/African Americans, Hispanic/Latinos, Asians and American Indians. We partner with Integration Collaboratives, Community Connectors/Advocates, Lower Sioux Communities, Greater Mankato Diversity Council, Upward Bound/Trio, Migrant Services, PACER Center, MN Council of Churches, Vocational Rehabilitation, MRCI, school districts, Adult Basic Education, and others. We also engage with leaders of the African and Karen immigrants, as well as the Hispanic, Latino, and Hmong communities that live in

different cities throughout the region. We do this often to build relationships with potential board members/staff, gain a greater understanding of their cultures and need for services; incorporate their feedback into the workforce development plan, organizational policies, and program practices. We also solicit direct, regular feedback through focus groups, individual meetings, and surveys from our participants.

Overall, our regional approach to ensure engagement includes diverse representation, specifically among populations experiencing the greatest barriers to employment or communities facing the greatest levels of economic disparities include:

- Reviewing labor market information and demographics, the leadership team will focus on assuring that, to the extent possible, the populations experiencing barriers to employment are engaged in both the regional and local workforce development area meetings, discussions, goal setting, strategy development and implementation strategies.
- Engaging stakeholders and individuals from diverse backgrounds and populations, as well as those experiencing barriers to employment is critical in establishing the goals and strategies that will lead to success.
- Assuring that the diverse demographic make-up of the RWDA #5 area is strategically involved in the identification of issues and solutions, goal setting and strategy development broadening the scope of success and advancement of workforce development in the region.
- Include partners in the engagement of individuals, decision makers representing specific populations and other key stakeholders including, but not limited to: individuals with disabilities; tribal communities; communities of color; K-12; higher education; individuals involved and/or representing the criminal justice system; and representatives specifically focused on addressing employment and education disparities.
- Provide career exploration, advising services and work-based learning opportunities with local employers to help students make informed career choices. These services are essential to successfully addressing employment disparities.
- Support and deliver cultural competency training for employers and staff.

The Boards and staff will make a concerted effort in designing and implementing programming that will directly engage diverse populations and groups experiencing specific barriers to employment. Both organizations practice and are compliant with equal opportunity hiring practices and will assure that appropriate outreach for employment opportunities is shared and targeted to special populations.

B.5. Describe how the local area boards will direct system alignment within the region through shared policies and practices.

The South Central WorkForce Council and Southwest Minnesota Workforce Development Board have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding to establish our regional partnership and cooperative service arrangements.

Together, we developed regional goals that align our workforce strategies. We jointly developed the required local area WIOA policies that align with state policy. The regional policies can be found at <https://www.workforcecouncil.org/regional-local-policies/> and including the following:

- Assessment
- Computer Policy
- Customized Training and On-The-Job Training
- Dislocated Worker Eligibility
- Discrimination Complaints
- Electronic Document Storage
- Employment Status Underemployed
- Follow-Up
- Incumbent Worker
- Language Access
- Program Complaints
- Provision of Training Services
- Transitional Jobs
- Statutory Priority for Adult
- Support Services

Staff from both local areas meet on a quarterly basis to review progress on regional goals, share best practices and collaborate on joint initiatives such as: Pathways to Prosperity programming for On-Ramp, Bridge, and Individualized Training Pathways; Women's Economic Security Act (WESA) and youth competitive grants focused on serving youth from BIPOC communities and youth with disabilities.

In addition, we conduct annual regional monitoring where we select participant files to review eligibility determination and documentation, documentation of privacy and complaint procedures, assessments, case management, employment plans, appropriate activities, training services for demand occupations, recording and documentation of credentials, work based learning and work experiences, job search/placement and follow up services.

- B.6. Describe any cooperative service arrangements being planned for the region and how they will promote consistency within the regional workforce development area and with state policy.

Areas of cooperative alignment and consistency within the region include:

- Development of fifteen regional workforce development area policies. The two local workforce boards have jointly developed required local WIOA policies in alignment with required state policies.
- Engaging stakeholders in the development and updates of the Regional Plan.

- Connecting with and informing local legislators on local and regional workforce development issues.
- Jointly direct the Rural Career Counseling Coordinators and their work with local school districts to increase career awareness and career counseling opportunities for students and parents. An example of this is the development and utilization of the “Know Before You Go” labor market infographics.
- Jointly provide professional development and sharing of best practices.
- Jointly respond to grant opportunities that advance our regional goals including the alignment of sector-based career pathways. Subcontracts are developed for each grant to ensure alignment and consistency across the region.
- Track program outcomes for individuals experiencing employment disparities and develop strategies to increase outcomes.
- Conduct regional monitoring to ensure consistency in program implementation, policies, and practices.
- Explore and implement joint marketing for the CareerForce system including use of social media.

SECTION C: PROGRAM AND SERVICE DELIVERY

C.1. Describe the condition of the regional economy (cite the sources of data and analysis);

Regional Workforce Development Area #5 (RWDA #5) or the Southwest Minnesota planning region consists of the 23-county area of South Central and Southwest Minnesota. The region includes three Economic Development Regions (Regions 6W, 8 and 9), two local workforce development areas (South Central and Southwest) and one metropolitan statistical area (greater Mankato/North Mankato area).

The RWDA #5 economy was analyzed by a thorough review of labor market information through our MN DEED Regional Labor Market Analysts and engaging board members, local employers and community partners in a dialogue about workforce development needs. This approach gives us a good understanding of the region by combining what statistics reveal with the real-time knowledge of local employers and community partners. The MN DEED Regional Profile for the 23-county labor market area is attached (Attachment 1). Sources of data and analysis are notated on the attached profile. Below is a summary of the data.

To better address the current needs of employers, we gathered input through a workforce development survey and two regional workforce development forums with employers and stakeholders in the region described earlier. They overwhelmingly identified workforce shortages and skills gaps as their top areas of concern. In addition to the regional labor market analysis provided by MN DEED, we rely heavily on dialogues with our regional employers and data updates from our Regional Analysts. Workforce development strategies will be responsive and adapted as needed.

The labor market in RWDA #5 is supported by a diverse industry base. As of 2022, the top industry sectors are: Manufacturing, Health Care & Social Assistance, Retail Trade, and Educational Services (see Table 14, Attachment 1). These four largest industries account for 56% of the region's employment. Manufacturing is the largest industry sector in RWDA #5 with nearly 1 in 5 jobs in manufacturing. Southwest is the only region of the state where Manufacturing is still the largest industry. After experiencing years of steady growth, Health Care and Social Assistance industry lost jobs over the last three years but remains our second largest industry. Retail trade were severely impacted during the pandemic but still remains a significant industry in the region due to part-time opportunities and lower-skill requirements. While over half of the industries in the region added jobs during the past year, the largest gains were in Manufacturing and Educational Services. Other industries that are more concentrated in the region include Accommodation & Food Services, Public Administration, Construction and Wholesale Trade.

Industry sectors with the largest projected growth from 2020-2030 includes: Arts, Entertainment & Recreation as well as Accommodation & Food Services. These industries were hardest hit during the pandemic and are now expected to have the fastest growth as the pandemic recovery continues (see Table 16, Attachment 1). Health Care & Social Assistance is projected to add the most new jobs over the next decade which would surpass Manufacturing as the largest industry in the region.

Based on location quotient, RWDA #5 stands out for having a high concentration of farming (2.6 location quotient), production, installation/maintenance/repair, transportation & material moving and education occupations (See Table 10, Attachment 1).

Occupations in Demand: There are well over 200 occupations showing relatively high demand in RWDA #5. These occupations are spread across different sectors but are concentrated in the region's major industries including manufacturing, health care, transportation, and other related industries (see Table 12, Attachment 1). A complete list of occupations in demand in RWDA #5 is provided as Attachment 2.

Other notable labor market information for the region includes:

Declining Population: Nineteen of the 23 counties in RWDA #5 lost population from 2010-2022. The four counties experiencing growth during this time period: Blue Earth, Le Sueur, Nicollet and Nobles counties (see Table 1, Attachment 1). Although births exceeded deaths in the region, out-migration outpaced in-migration. The number of immigrants in the region increased by 41% since 2010, outpacing the statewide growth of 30.6%.

Population by Race: Although the region is less diverse than the state, it is becoming more diverse over time. RWDA #5 had a higher percentage of people reporting Hispanic/Latino origin than the state and Nobles County, reporting 29.2% of residents with Hispanic origin, has the highest rate in the state. Blue Earth, Cottonwood, Lyon and Watonwan counties are also relatively diverse.

Labor Force Change: The pandemic recession greatly impacted the labor force in RWDA #5. In 2021, the region had the fewest people working or looking for work in more than 20 years (see Figure 6, Attachment 1). This was the most severe decline of the 6 planning regions in the state and the region has not fully recovered. Increasingly tight labor markets and growing scarcity of workers is now recognized as one of the most significant barriers to future economic growth in the region. A more diverse workforce in terms of age, gender, race, ethnicity, disability status and immigration has been and will continue to be a vital source of workers as white, native-born workforce continues to age, these younger workers of different races/countries will comprise the fastest growing segment of the labor force. In addition, Labor Force Projections reveal that the region is expected to see a significant decline in the 25-44 year olds in the labor force by 2035. These declines are believed to be a result of the pandemic as individuals left the workforce due to safety concerns, being needed in the home to care for school age children and finding alternative ways to support their household, such as having one parent instead of two parents working. There are also significant barriers such as lack of transportation and childcare that impact individuals ability to participate in the labor force.

Jobseekers per Vacancy: RWDA #5 experienced three straight years of less than one job seeker per vacancy prior to the pandemic, indicating an extremely tight labor market. The pandemic caused a spike to a ratio of 2.3 but it quickly declined. RWDA #5 has one of the tightest labor markets in the state as evident in the job seeker per job vacancy rate, which stood at an all-time low of .3 in RWDA #5 in the second quarter of 2022 (See Figure 9, Attachment 1). In other words, for every 10 job openings there are only three job seekers available. This does not take into account the skills or education requirements needed for the job. With the declining populations, labor force changes and low unemployment rates in the region, we anticipate that this ratio could decrease.

Unemployment Rates: With our diverse industry base, RWDA #5 has experienced relatively low unemployment rates. The annual unemployment rate for 2022 was 2.6% (see Figure 8, Attachment 1). According to the Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) provided by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate for South Central in November 2023 was 1.7%, which is the lowest rate on record since 1990. Comparing Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA), Mankato/Blue Earth County have the second lowest unemployment rate in the nation.

Employment Characteristics: Although unemployment rates have been relatively low in RWDA #5, not all populations are benefiting from low unemployment rates. Populations experiencing employment disparities were highest among young people, minorities and individuals with disabilities. Unemployment Rates in 2021 for these populations include (see Table 6, Attachment 1):

- Youth ages 16 to 19 (9.1%)
- Youth ages 20 to 24 (4.9%)
- Black or African American (7.6%)
- American Indian & Alaskan Native (3.7%)
- Asian or Pacific Islander (6.3%)

- Hispanic or Latino (8.4%)
- Individual with disabilities (9.6%)

Household Incomes: Household incomes are significantly lower in RWDA #5 than the state as a whole. Median household income in RWDA #5 was \$64,119 in 2021, compared to \$77,706 statewide. Almost 40% of households in the region had incomes below \$50,000. Income disparities by race and ethnicity also exist. African American households reported the lowest incomes in the region at \$37,546, American Indians at \$55,723, Asians at \$48,802 and Hispanic/Latino at \$51,805 (Figure 12, Attachment 1).

C.2. Describe the sectors or occupations of focus for region, including:

Upon review of labor market information and input from employers and stakeholders, RWDA #5 will focus on key industry sectors:

- **Agriculture**
- **Construction**
- **Education**
- **Health Care and Social Assistance**
- **Manufacturing**
- **Transportation and Warehousing**

Although industries like Retail Trade and Accommodation & Food Services provide a number of employment opportunities in the region, they are often the first job for individuals; these jobs are frequently low skilled and/or low wage jobs; and were significantly impacted by the pandemic.

Agriculture: RWDA #5 has 5.9 percent of the total employment in the state of Minnesota; however, RWDA #5 accounts for 26.6 percent of the farms in the state (see Table 18, Attachment 1). Agriculture has one of the highest share of non-white employment (21%) in the region. Occupations in demand include farmworkers-crops, farmworkers-animals, agriculture equipment operators and farm equipment mechanics. RWDA #5 is fortunate to be the home of the Southern Minnesota Center of Agriculture to promote agricultural education opportunities in the state. In addition, GreenSeam, which is also located in our region, is an economic development organization that supports agricultural businesses in the state.

Construction: Although new employment growth under Construction is only expected to be a little over 400 jobs, the industry is expected to need about 2,600 replacement openings to fill jobs left by retirement and other career changers. Of the key industries in the region, construction provides higher paying job opportunities with an average annual wage of \$63,309. Occupations in demand include carpenters, electricians, laborers, operating engineers, and plumbers & pipefitters. Support occupations like Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning are also in demand. Employers and labor unions work closely with partners to connect with local high schools to develop a pipeline of workers for this industry.

Education: The Southwest region stands out for having a higher concentration of Education, Training and Library employment in the state with a location quotient of 1.2%. The industry's employment projections based on job growth mirror the current job vacancies, which would show signs that the industry is stable. However, Education is expected to need over 4,608 replacement openings. This industry was greatly impacted by the pandemic when schools were forced to close and classrooms pivoted to remote learning. Local school districts experienced losses in enrollment as families chose other education options such as homeschooling, which impacted district budgets and resulted in layoffs. Schools are now challenged with addressing education gaps that occurred during the pandemic as well as mental health issues affecting our youth. There is also a shortage of substitute teachers. Teachers are retiring early as well as changing careers, leaving an immense strain on this industry.

Health Care & Social Assistance: The Health Care & Social Assistance industry was greatly impacted by the pandemic losing more than 2,300 jobs, a 7.5% decrease. However, this industry is projected to grow from 2020 to 2030 by adding 2,729 jobs, a 9.3% increase. This anticipated growth would surpass Manufacturing as the region's largest industry. Occupations in demand include Dental Assistants, Dental Hygienists, EMTs, Home Health Aides, LPNs, Medical Secretaries, Medical Assistants, Mental Health Counselors, Nursing Assistants, Personal Care Aides, Pharmacy Technicians and Registered Nurses. Long-term care facilities indicate that CNAs are difficult to hire at this time and continues to drive the wage increases. Hospitals/clinics indicate they are looking for LPN and RN. The pandemic caused many nurses to retire early. Large providers who have historically provided higher wages and better benefits (hospitals & clinics) are starting to revise their minimum qualifications, eliminating required experience and certifications, and providing flexible scheduling in order to attract more workforce. In addition, employers are considering other perks for employees such as on-site daycare as well as transportation or car purchase assistance to support workers. Prior to the pandemic there was a great demand for health care workers, and now that demand is even higher.

Manufacturing: With 32,109 jobs at 634 firms, manufacturing is the largest industry in the region. Like construction, manufacturing provides higher wage employment opportunities with an average annual wage of \$61,942. Occupations in demand include industrial machinery mechanics, industrial engineers & technicians, machinists, machine operators, production workers and welders. Employers indicate they are significantly impacted by retirements. Many employers indicate they are targeting non-traditional talent pools, upskilling their current workforce and developing partnerships with local high schools. In addition, manufacturing hires the highest share of non-white employment at 29%.

Transportation & Warehousing: The Southwest region has a higher level of transportation & warehousing employment with a location quotient of 1.2%. Transportation is expected to need over 7,500 replacement openings to fill jobs left by retirements (see Figure 15, Attachment 1). Transportation & warehousing is projected to grow by 5.8% from 2020-2030 or 432 jobs. Occupations in demand include laborers & freight stock movers, stock clerks and tractor-trailer truck drivers. In addition, supporting occupations in demand include automotive service technicians & mechanics and diesel mechanics. An emerging occupation in this industry is

shuttle and chauffeur services with the rise in Uber and Lyft services as well as delivery services such as DoorDash.

- a. How the region will use the labor market information and conduct outreach to business and industry to select the targeted sectors for developing sector partnerships for occupations in demand that provide family sustaining wages. If sectors and occupations have been already selected, describe them within this response.

As described above, we utilized a rich set of labor market information to determine key industry sectors: agriculture, construction, education, health care/social assistance, manufacturing and transportation/warehousing.

RWDA #5 has developed the regional workforce strategy to expand the number of skilled workers through sector-based career pathway approaches in key industries.

Our regional strategies to coordinate efforts to address workforce needs in target industry sectors and occupations is through a four-prong approach:

1. Development of employer-led industry sector partnerships for in-demand industry sectors.
2. Development and implementation of sector initiatives for in-demand industry sectors led by industry leaders.
3. Expand the number of skilled workers through sector-based career pathway approaches in key industries.
4. Employer engagement through boards, committees, career awareness, work-based learning and employer events.

Development of employer-led industry sector partnerships for in-demand industry sectors: In partnership with our MN DEED Workforce Strategy Consultant we started two employer-led industry sector partnerships for our two largest employment industries: Health Care/Social Assistance and Manufacturing. These two partnerships started strategic planning and the development and implementation of action plans. Strategic planning has revealed that their key issues revolve around recruiting talent, retaining talent, and training. Strategies these two partnerships are especially interested in pursuing include innovative recruitment strategies for diverse populations, connections with local high schools to expose students to in-demand careers and developing a pipeline of workers, providing work-based learning opportunities and knowledge/access to workforce development resources in the region. The MN DEED Workforce Strategy Consultant position has been vacant and is in the hiring process. We look forward to resuming this activity when the position has been filled.

In addition, we anticipate developing new sector partnerships as we expand career pathway opportunities and partnerships between students and local employers.

Development and implementation of sector initiatives for in-demand industry sectors: In partnership with local employers representing key industries, a number of sector initiatives are being implemented to support expanding the talent pipeline for the industry. Initiatives include:

- The development of industry-specific infographics and newsletters that provides “customer friendly” labor market information for our key industries including: agriculture, construction, education, health care/social assistance, manufacturing and transportation. The infographics and newsletters are specifically targeted to high school students and their parents to assist in making informed career choices. With Minnesota having the third worst student-to-school counselor ratio in the nation, this information as well as career advising services in general is greatly needed and welcomed by our school and community partners.
- The development of industry-specific career exploration events for high school students spotlighting key industries and in-demand occupations in the region including:
 - Construct Tomorrow: a one-day, hands-on event that allows high school students to explore the multiple trade occupations in the construction industry.
 - Construction Trades Boot Camp: a two-week summer event that allows high school students to explore more in-depth occupations in the trades/construction industry. This year, we piloted a school year program on early release days where students were able to explore occupations in the trades with a hands-on activity. In the morning, a session was held for students from Adult Basic Education. In the afternoon, another session was held for high school students.
 - SCRUBS Camp: a 3-day hands-on summer event for high school students to explore in-demand occupations in the health care industry.
 - Tour of Manufacturing: a one-day event that allows high school students to tour local manufacturers to expose them to the demand occupations in the manufacturing industry.
- Conducting industry-specific roundtables. Roundtables are conducted to convene employers from a specific key industries to identify and address issues specific to the industry. Roundtables have been held with the health care industry, manufacturing industry and transportation industry. An example of addressing a specific issue to an industry is working with employers to explore ways to address the lack of behind-the-wheel CDL training in the local area.

Career pathway approaches for key industry sectors and occupations in the region: In partnership with area employers, Adult Basic Education, post-secondary and CareerForce partners we have developed a regional approach to adult career pathways for the construction, education, health care, manufacturing and transportation industries. Career pathway development is constructed based on employer input on industry and occupational skill needs and on the input from targeted populations including race/ethnicity, disability, gender and age. Partners develop strategies to address the unique needs of targeted populations and provide the additional supports necessary to ensure individuals can be successful in their education/training pathway and employment. Consistent with the mission in the state plan, our career pathway approach aligns local, state, and federal resources, policies, services and system partners to meet the workforce needs of business and industry and improves access to employment, education, and training services for Minnesota's current and future workforce.

In addition, partnerships with career pathway programs at local school districts provide industry sector-based work experience opportunities for youth. One example is a rotational healthcare work experience with Benedictine Living Center and River's Edge Hospital and Clinic in St. Peter, which allows students to explore different careers in the healthcare setting.

Employer engagement through boards, committees, career awareness, work-based learning opportunities and employer events: Finally, we receive industry-specific input from employers through their involvement on our workforce development boards, participation on committees and by engaging them in career awareness and work-based learning activities. This engagement is instrumental to ensuring our strategies and initiatives meet the skill needs of our local industry employers. We engage employers through four Career Expos in the region, Career Institutes, Breaking Traditions, College Experience Day, and Pathway Exploration Events. We are facilitating partnerships between workforce development, employers and local high schools to provide work experience, internship and job shadowing opportunities. In addition, through employer events we are showcasing innovative recruitment strategies, best practices and the sharing of resources available for local employers.

Other initiatives that engage employers include:

- The development of Skills for Success in Education, Employment and Life curriculum. Originally, Skills for Success was designed as classroom presentations on the following topics: career assessment, career planning & exploration, labor market information, work readiness skills, job search, post-

secondary planning and financial literacy. To compliment the curriculum, a video series was developed on [Skills](#), [Interviewing](#) and [Maintaining Employment](#). Each video contains advice from four local employers representing the healthcare, manufacturing, construction and agriculture industries.

- In 2023, we launched a new initiative to create the Career Passport Video series. The Career Passport videos are modeled after PBS' Road Trip Nation where students interview members of their communities with fulfilling careers, learn about their work and industry and video tape it to be shared with peers. This is a student-center approach that expands the scope of career possibilities and understanding of a career pathway while partnering with local employers to feature in-demand occupations in key industry sectors. The Career Passport videos will be shared with students, educators, CareerForce partners and others through social media stories and in newsletters. Career Passport video stories featuring agriculture are being finalized and we are in the planning stages to record videos in healthcare.

Our outreach methodology to contact employers from key industry sectors includes:

- Partnering with our regional MN DEED Workforce Strategy Consultant to provide direct connections with individual employers and groups of industry employers.
- We have specific staff Rural Career Counseling Coordinators (RC3) and Work & Learn Coordinators (paid through agreements with our local Service Cooperatives) provide outreach and connections between local employers and local school districts.
- We conduct outreach to local employers through social media and newsletters.
- Connecting with employers that have been engaged with the CareerForce system through WIOA and Wagner Peysner staff.
- One on one contact with area employers to develop work-based learning opportunities.
- Collaborating with Chambers of Commerce, economic development and other local partners to provide referrals and assist in outreach to area employers.
- Utilizing business representatives on our workforce boards to provide outreach to industry and community groups they are involved in.
- In partnership with our MN DEED Workforce Strategy Consultant and Job Service staff, utilizing MN DEED's gov delivery email blasts to employers from specific industries.

Employers are connected to the workforce system through all of the activities identified above. Whether serving on a sector-based partnership, committee, attending a roundtable, or participating in a sector initiative, we provide information on how to connect with the workforce system and the services that are available.

These strategies are aligned with Goal #2 in the state plan to: build employer-led industry-sector partnerships to create or expand responsive and equitable workforce development programs and career pathways with embedded work-based learning or on-the-job training, including Registered Apprenticeships, focused on closing gaps in participation and representation based on race, ethnicity, disability, gender, veteran status, and age.

- b. Alignment to the five sectors of focus in Drive for 5, including which local area in the region is focused on each or any of the Drive for 5 sectors. Complete Attachment G – Local Workforce Development Area Key Industries in Regional Economy.

The RWDA #5 key industry sectors: agriculture, construction, education, health care/social assistance, manufacturing and transportation/warehousing align with four of the Drive for Five industry sectors. The fifth industry sector, Information Technology is intertwined in all industries. RWDA #5, which includes local workforce development areas (Southwest and South Central) received a Drive for Five grant to expand employment and training services to encompass all Drive for Five sectors.

- c. The make-up of the sector partnerships will be determined and the expertise and resources they bring to the partnership.

As mentioned above, there are a variety of ways sector partnerships will be utilized in the region including: employer-led sector partnerships, sector initiatives, career pathway approaches and employer engagement in workforce development activities. The makeup of each sector partnership is determined by the specific industry and employers (champions) that volunteer to participate. Employers that lead sector partnerships/initiatives are encouraged to recruit their peers within their industry.

- C.3. The demographic makeup of the labor force in those sectors as compared to the regional labor force, and how the region will work to close any identified gaps.

In RWDA #5, Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) account for 13.9% of the total population in Southwest Minnesota and hold roughly the same share of jobs, compared to the state overall where they amount to 22.5% of the population but only hold 15.2% of jobs. The number of jobs held by minorities has more than doubled since 2000 when BIPOC held only 6% of the jobs.

Among key industry sectors in RWDA #5, Manufacturing employs the largest number of non-White workers (9,135 jobs), followed by Healthcare & Social Assistance (3,572 jobs), Agriculture

(1,093 jobs), Construction (875 jobs) and Transportation & Warehousing (470 jobs). The highest share of non-White employment is in Manufacturing at 29% and Agriculture at 21%.

As the white, native-born workforce continues to age, younger workers of different races/countries will comprise the fastest growing segment of the labor force and will be a vital source of workers to meet employer workforce needs in an increasingly tight labor market in the region. Demographic information identifies gaps as well as opportunities that exist for employers. This region will use this information to address regional goals to expand the number of skilled workers through sector-based career pathways in key industries by targeting BIPOC populations for career pathway programming. This information will also guide our regional goal to provide training and assistance to help businesses retain and attract the diverse workforce.

- C.4. How the local board will make opportunities in these areas known to customers, including employers and job seekers, and how the local board will create, modify or expand responsive workforce development programs and initiatives.

The regional partnership will work in collaboration to market services to employers and job seekers through proven targeted campaigns. We have established relationships with local employers and with different ethnic communities including contact information. We share information and opportunities directly with employers and community leaders. We utilize personalized calls, emails, text messages; presentations to groups; regional videos; social media; culturally specific materials in multiple languages at locations where targeted populations go, shop, eat, worship, and receive services; as well as reaching out to current/past participants. We participate in many community meetings. Highlighting our past successes and having past participants help in recruiting is a key strategy. Materials/Videos are sent out to community partners and distributed at CareerForce, libraries, community events, career fairs, and more. We are also flexible in where and how the services are delivered to better ensure greater participation.

- C.5. Based on the regional/local assessment of workforce development system services, describe how strategies will be created to pursue a more responsive alignment of employment and training services.

Strategies to include responsive alignment of employment and training services include regularly bringing stakeholders together to talk about the services including how to: improve them, meet industry demands, facilitate community outreach to targeted populations, fill gaps in services, and partner to promote greater alignment. CareerForce partners meet monthly, the private sector led Workforce Development

Boards meet six times a year plus the Youth Committee and other board committees meet regularly. These committees have representation from key stakeholders and partners in the region. Labor Market Information and program outcomes are shared regularly to promote data-driven solutions. Partners widely share information about available services and resources and work together to avoid unnecessary duplication of services. This collaboration with community partners also helps to provide comprehensive, wraparound services to participants. The location and method of service delivery are considered to better ensure all residents have access to programs and services. This includes but not limited to individuals: who are traditionally underrepresented, with disabilities, lacking basic skills or digital skills, who speak languages other than English, who are BIPOC, who live in small rural townships, and/or who were formally incarcerated.

- C.6. Describe how the entities responsible for participating in this process will be selected, including their expected roles and responsibilities.

All entities who provide services related to employment and training are invited to participate. We are intentional about engaging as many stakeholders as possible and recognize that greater impact is found in collaboration. Adult Basic Education provides English Language Learning, basic skills and digital literacy training, and contextualized bridge, work-readiness instructor, and integrated skills training in our career pathways programming. Region #5 colleges, Minnesota West Community & Technical College and South Central College provide credentialed course instruction, space, equipment, and issue credential and/or academic credit as applicable. The Southwest Minnesota Private Industry Council, South Central WorkForce Council/Minnesota Valley Action Council, DEED Job Service, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, MRCI, and DEED Veterans Services are the workforce development providers. Their role is to be the facilitator/fiscal agent, provide coordination of all partners, and hire/train the Navigator who recruits/enrolls/supports participants, provides case management, approves training plans, collects data, engages employers, and establishes career exploration activities. Employer partners provide curriculum input, assistance in teaching employability and essentials skills training, business tours, mentorship, interviewing and hiring program participants. School districts and service coops coordinate courses with CTE courses in the high schools, provide training space and refer students to career pathways training courses to ensure course offering are filled for economies of scale. Community organizations and counties are a great source of referrals and partners when addressing the individual barriers to success. We also partner with Integration Collaboratives,

Community Connectors, Lower Sioux Indian Community, Greater Mankato Diversity Council, Migrant Services, PACER Center, Minnesota Council of Churches, and others for outreach and referrals, and culturally specific services. We also engage with leaders of the African and Karen immigrants and the Hispanic and Hmong communities. The partners of this collaboration learn from each other, avoid duplication of services, address unmet needs, innovate, and improve outcomes.

- C.7. Describe how outcomes will be determined in terms of employment and training services.

Employment and training outcomes include employment rates, retention rates, skill and/or credential attainment, training completion rates, measurable skills gain, wage progression, and sometimes additional ones depending on the grant/program. Other data tracked may include participant enrollment by demographics, attendance, participant performance at a worksite, placement rates by industry, occupation, and demographic factors, cost per participant, and customer satisfaction surveys. The specific outcomes are determined by a combination of the grant and/or funder, historical data, input from the communities served, and overall strategic goals for the region. Systematically measuring these outcomes can provide valuable insights into program improvement and demonstrate the impact of our employment and training services on individuals and the region as a whole.

Local Plan Template

SECTION A: LOCAL BOARDS VISION, GOALS AND STRATEGIES

- A.1. Describe the local area board's strategic vision for preparing a skilled workforce and how it aligns with the State's Vision, Goals and Strategies.

As a partner in Regional Workforce Development Area #5, the South Central WorkForce Council and region has adopted the One Minnesota Workforce Development Vision statement:

The vision of Regional Workforce Development Area #5 is a healthy economy where all Minnesotans have equitable access to a workforce development system in which partners across the state are working toward a collective goal of providing workforce development programs that are responsive to employer needs in in-demand occupations and lead to good jobs with family-sustaining wages.

This vision aligns with the state's priorities and expresses our intent to "leave no populations behind", ensuring all individuals have the resources and services they need to make informed career choices, obtain the skills necessary to compete for demand occupations with family sustaining wages, based on sector-based career pathway approaches that meets employers' needs for a skilled workforce. This vision will be accomplished through our employer-led boards and sector-based career pathway partnerships.

- A.2. Describe the local area board's goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce, including youth, individuals with barriers to employment, and individuals underrepresented in the local labor force.

In order to accomplish the vision above and in response to regional priorities identified by local stakeholders, RWDA #5 has identified three goals:

1. Increase high school student's understanding of and exposure to regional occupations in demand.
2. Expand the number of skilled workers through sector-based career pathway approaches in key industries.
3. Provide training and assistance to help businesses retain and attract the diverse workforce they need now and into the future.

In order to compete for high growth, high demand jobs that pay a livable wage, our target populations need to acquire the skills and industry-recognized credentials required by employers in key industries. RWDA #5's vision and goals will address the needs of our target populations by providing pathways to skill training that leads to stackable credits, credentials, and the skills necessary to compete for employment in high-demand industries that lead to self-supporting wages, meeting the needs of employers for a skilled workforce. In addition to addressing the priority issues identified by our regional stakeholders, these goals also align with the goals of the state to: 1) Build employer-led industry-sector

partnerships that expand responsive and equitable programs and pathways focused on closing the gaps in participation and representation based on race, disability, gender, veteran status and age to meet industry demands for a skilled workforce and, 2) create a more inclusive, equitable, accessible and proactive workforce system to serve all Minnesotans, preparing employers and the current and emerging workforce.

A.3. Describe how these goals relate to the performance accountability measures based on the primary indicators to support regional economic growth and economic self-sufficiency.

The performance accountability measures under WIOA measure our effectiveness in serving job seekers and employers. Measures include: employment, retention, earnings gain, credentials, skill gains and effectiveness in serving employers. Our goals align well with these performance accountability measures. Our effectiveness in addressing Goals 1, 2, and 3 listed above is measured by how many individuals attain the skills and credentials necessary to be placed and retained in employment, resulting in earnings gain through employment in demand occupations that lead to self-sustaining wages. Achievement of these goals effectively serves employers in that they provide a skilled workforce for employers providing demand occupations in key industries. Our goal to expand skilled workers includes closing the gap in participation and representation of individuals experiencing employment disparities relies upon employment, retention and earnings gain performance outcomes in order to measure our attainment of this goal. In addition, in order to achieve employment and increased earnings gains, individuals need to obtain credentials and skill gains in order to compete and obtain employment in demand occupations that lead to family-sustaining wages.

A.4. Describe the strategy to work with the entities within your local workforce development area that carry out the core programs to align resources available to the local area to achieve the strategic vision and goals of the local area board and the state.

The South Central WorkForce Council places a high priority on our role to convene and develop strong relationships with local workforce development area partners and to aligning the expertise and resources of these partners to achieve our strategic vision and goals.

The establishment of CareerForce locations in itself is a strategic alignment of the core programs of WIOA to meet the workforce development needs of area employers and job seekers. The co-location of WIOA programs, the relationships developed across partners, the development of the Memorandum of Understanding and cost allocation plans all contribute to the alignment and collaboration of core programs. Having WIOA Title I providers, Wagner Peyser, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Veterans Employment Services, Services for the Blind, UI/REA services in a one-stop location allow us to collaborate, avoid duplication and meet the unique needs of targeted populations.

A primary strategy to align the resources of the core programs to achieve our strategic vision and goals is through our career pathway approach. Our career pathway approach aligns the resources and expertise of workforce development partners in order to streamline employment and training services and to provide the additional supports necessary for individuals with barriers to employment to be successful. The SC Career Pathways Partnership includes representatives of CareerForce partners, Adult Basic Education, South Central College, Human Services and community partners that work tirelessly to identify the expertise of each partner and align resources and services to meet the needs of individuals we serve.

The South Central WorkForce Council and its committees also provides an opportunity for strategic alignment of the core programs to achieve our vision and goals. Employers, core CareerForce partners, Adult Basic Education, Minnesota State, labor, human services, economic development and community organizations are all represented on the Council. These partners participate in the development and implementation of action plans to achieve our mission and goals, identifying roles and responsibilities of each of the partners in implementing strategies, and achieving our goals.

A.5. Describe a best practice or area of strength of the local area as it relates to the State's Vision, Goals and Strategies that should be considered for replication or scale across the state.

The South Central WorkForce Council has developed the following innovative programming that aligns with the State goals:

- Sector-Based Career Pathway Programming in Quality Jobs. South Central has a long history of providing a comprehensive career pathway approach that provides career navigation services and academic support for adult learners to increase their basic skills and work readiness skills as well as obtain industry related certificates/credentials in demand industries that offer quality jobs the lead to family sustaining wages for all populations. The first level of programming is our On-Ramp program where adult learners are introduced to career opportunities in target industries and earn entry level certificates such as First Aid/CPR and OSHA 10. The next level of programming is the Bridge program where students participate in integrated courses that are team taught by South Central College instructors and Adult Basic Education teachers. The college provides the subject content and the ABE teachers provide academic support with tutoring and study sessions. Students earn industry credentials such as nursing assistant and welding certifications. The next level of programming is for students that want to continue for post-secondary training programs such as RN, LPN, Medical Assistant, Machine Tool Technology and Mechatronics. There are multiple entry and exits points that meet the needs of adult learners. The continuum of programming provides entry and advancement in occupations in in-demand industries that lead to quality jobs with family-sustaining wages.
- Employer Led Sector Initiatives in Construction. The South Central WorkForce Council has two appointed members from union construction trades including: Jon Nowak, North

Central States Regional Council of Carpenters and Stacey Karels, Local 563. Their representation on our Council and Youth Council has provided valuable feedback on workforce programs and created a heightened awareness of labor shortages in the construction trades. This partnership has expanded to the Mankato Building Trades Council which includes representatives from all of the construction trades. The Mankato Building Trades Council membership has participated in local career exploration events, presented at local school districts and participated in industry panels.

Each year the partnership hosts the Mankato Construct Tomorrow event where over 600 students from 28 schools districts attend. The feedback we receive from school counselors and teachers indicates that students enjoy the event and get excited about construction careers but are not clear on their next steps. Construct Tomorrow helps students identify an interest in construction but they still might not know which trade is right for them. A student in 9th through 11th grade that is interested in a construction career, would have to wait years before they could sign up for an apprenticeship. As a result, the partnership developed the South Central Construction Trades Boot Camp, which is a two week interactive camp that provides hands-on experiences for youth to gain exposure to careers in the constructions trades. This year, we piloted a school year program on early release days where students were able to explore occupations in the trades with a hands-on activity. In the morning, a session was held for students from Adult Basic Education. In the afternoon, another session was held for high school students.

The dedication and leadership of the South Central Construction Trades Partnership was recognized as a promising practice by the Minnesota Association of Workforce Board (MAWB). The South Central Construction Trades Bootcamp has been replicated in Central Minnesota.

- Career Exploration and Awareness for High School Students
Minnesota has the third highest student to school counselor ratio in the nation. Small, rural school districts are greatly impacted by the shortage of school counselors. The Partners In Career Exploration program places interns in local rural school districts to provide one-on-one career exploration and career counseling assistance to high school students. The interns are first year graduate students in the Student Counseling Program at Minnesota State University-Mankato. Interns are placed at local school districts to provide career exploration and career counseling assistance through one-on-one advising and classroom presentations. The intern meets with every high school junior and senior enabling them to reach students that are not proactive about their plans after high school and would otherwise go unnoticed and fall through the cracks. We are currently hosting interns at five local school districts. The Partners in Career Exploration program was recognized as a promising practice by MAWB and received the Theodore E. Small Workforce Partnership Award from the National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB).

- Summer Internship Programs for College Students

The Martin County Internship Project is a partnership with Martin County Commissioners, Minnesota Valley Action Council and the South Central WorkForce Council. The goal of this project is to expose college age youth to potential career opportunities in Martin County to attract them back to the area after graduation. Last summer, 14 youth were recruited, assessed and matched with for-profit and non-profit paid internships. The project was recognized by the Association of Minnesota Counties for a County Achievement Award. This project has been replicated in Waseca, Murray and Nobles Counties in South Central and Southwest Minnesota.

A.6. Describe the sectors or occupations of focus for the local area board, including:

The local area key industry sectors: agriculture, construction, education, health care/social assistance, manufacturing and transportation/warehousing align with the regional industries.

The occupations of focus include the following:

- Agriculture: Agriculture Equipment Operators, Farmworkers
- Construction: Carpenter, HVAC Technician, and Plumbing Certificate, Boiler License.
- Education: Paraprofessional, Child Development, Teacher Assistants, Elementary, Middle School & Secondary Teachers
- Healthcare: Personal Care Assistant (PCA), Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), Trained Medication Aid (TMA), Community Interpreter Certificate, EMT, Health Unit Coordinator (HUC), Phlebotomy.
- Manufacturing: OSHA 10, NIMS Credentials, MSSC Certified Production Technician Credential, Welding Certificate, Forklift Operator Certificate, Machine Tool Technology Certificate, Mechatronics Industrial Maintenance Certificate.
- Transportation: CDL Permit Preparation, Class A and/or B Commercial Driver's License, Automotive Service Technician Certificate, Auto Body Repair Certificate.

a. How those sectors compare to the sectors of focus within your workforce region;

The local area key industry sectors: agriculture, construction, education, health care/social assistance, manufacturing and transportation/warehousing align with the regional industries.

b. The demographic makeup of the labor force in those sectors as compared to the local labor force, and how the local area will work to close any identified gaps;

In South Central, Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) account for 8.9% of the total population and hold 6.2% share of jobs. While we still have gaps, we are seeing progress. The number of jobs held by minorities has more than doubled since 2001 when BIPOC held only 2.9% of the jobs. Black and African Americans held 2,622 jobs, which is the largest race group in South Central and increased 176% since 2001. Asians held 1,717 jobs, which was a 59% increase. Hispanic and Latino workers filled 7,348

jobs, which was an increase of 91.4%. Among key industry sectors in South Central, Manufacturing employs the largest number of non-White workers followed by Healthcare & Social Assistance.

As the white, native-born workforce continues to age, younger workers of different races/countries will comprise the fastest growing segment of the labor force and will be a vital source of workers to meet employer workforce needs in an increasingly tight labor market in the region. Demographic information identifies gaps as well as opportunities that exist for employers. This region will use this information to address regional goals to expand the number of skilled workers through sector-based career pathways in key industries by targeting BIPOC populations for career pathway programming. This information will also guide our regional goal to provide training and assistance to help businesses retain and attract the diverse workforce.

- c. How the local board will make opportunities in these areas known to customers, including employers and job seekers, and how the local board will create, modify or expand responsive workforce development programs and initiatives.

South Central utilizes a vast network of over 150 workforce development professionals including those that serve target populations to market services and career opportunities in the local area. We utilize websites, social media, videos, television, radio, brochures, posters, flyers, and newsletters. Announcements are posted on monitors at human services, courthouses, community centers, and CareerForce locations. We participate in booths at job fairs, career fairs for students and resource fairs for the public. Printed materials are posted in a variety of places in the community that job seekers may visit including laundromats, community centers, recreation facilities, libraries, events, thrift stores, food shelves, food distribution events. Another source of communication is word of mouth from program participants and employers that have utilized services. We target our marketing efforts to reach diverse populations through community leaders and organizations including Minnesota Council of Churches, Mankato YWCA, Life-Work Planning Center, Motivation Education & Training, Migrant Farmworker Program, COPAL, Unidos, and Hikmah.

- A.7. Describe the process used by the local area board to provide opportunity for public comment, including comment by representatives from businesses and comment by representatives of labor organizations, and input into the development of the local plan, prior to submission of the plan.

A public notice of the Regional and Local Plan was published in April in the legal notices section of three local newspapers (Fairmont, Mankato and New Ulm) and posted on the South Central

WorkForce Council website. The notice indicates that the plan is available for review and comment on our website for 30 days and provides information on how to provide input or comment. Opportunities for review and comment are also provided to our core partners, stakeholders and other interested parties through board meetings and committee meetings. Through their representation on the South Central WorkForce Council, representatives of business and organized labor participate in the development of our regional and local unified plan. The SC WorkForce Council includes representatives of the following industries: construction, manufacturing, health care and social assistance, and business and professional services. In addition, we have two active labor representatives from the North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters and Laborers' International Union of North America - Local 563 who represent the trades industry and are involved in the review process. Any input/comments received on the plan are documented for the record.

- A.8. Describe how the local area is working together to prepare the workforce for state and federal investments in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), the Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors (CHIPS) and Science Act, and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) (collectively referred to as Investing in America (IIA)).

South Central partners closely with the Region 9 Development Commission and local economic development professionals. Alejandra Bejarano from Region 9 Development Commission is a member of the South Central WorkForce Council board. The WorkForce Council is also the advisory board that approves the Region 9 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies, which identifies new projects and initiatives in the local area. We will rely on these partnerships to keep abreast of how the legislation will impact our local area. As projects and initiatives are identified, we are prepared to respond to workforce and training needs accordingly.

SECTION B: PROGRAM OPERATIONS

CareerForce Operations – Connection to Services

- B.1. Describe how local area boards will work with each other, core title providers and available data to designate at least one CareerForce Center per local workforce development area as comprehensive and make recommendations on recognizing affiliate and standalone partner sites.

The South Central WorkForce Council, in consultation with our core partners, has designated three CareerForce locations in the 9-county area of South Central MN. The centers are located in: Fairmont, Mankato and New Ulm.

Core Partners at the CareerForce locations include:

- MN DEED Job Service –Wagner Peyser Services & WIOA Provider

- MN DEED REA
- MN DEED State Services for the Blind
- MN DEED Veterans Employment Services
- MN DEED Vocational Rehabilitation Services
- MN Valley Action Council –WIOA Provider

During Program Year 2022, through these three CareerForce locations, 685 documented job seekers physically visited our three CareerForce locations to utilize our career labs and/or attend workshops. Data also shows these 685 job seekers accounted for 2,071 computer sessions during the year. This number does not include the number of job seekers who receive services and/or information (in person and online) but did not register on the client registration system. During this same time period, 400 employers submitted 25,645 job orders for 29,426 job openings.

CareerForce locations and staff at these locations are vital to ease of access to services and developing relationships with local employers and job seekers. While the pandemic forced the system to provide services remotely, it also emphasized that there are certain populations we serve that can self-serve and there are other populations that need the one-on-one, in-person assistance and really struggle with remote services.

In addition to the three CareerForce locations noted above, we are fortunate in South Central that MN Valley Action Council has “stand-alone” offices located in: Blue Earth, Gaylord, LeCenter, St. James, St. Peter, and Waseca. These offices provide access to computers and staff to assist individuals with their job search in their respective counties (WIOA Adult/DW resources are not utilized to pay for infrastructure at these sites).

B.2. Describe the strategies to ensure proper connectivity and coordination among the physical sites within the local workforce development area.

There are numerous strategies in our workforce development area that ensures coordination and connectivity among the physical sites within our local workforce development area including:

- The South Central Operations Committee. The Operations Committee meets monthly and is made up of the core partners of CareerForce locations. The managers ensure that communication, services, and processes are consistent in the three physical locations.
- In addition to the SC Operations Committee, a consortium of core partners has been designated to provide One-Stop Operator services through a Request for Proposal process. A One-Stop Operator agreement will be entered into that delineates the responsibilities and duties of the One-Stop Operator, including connectivity and coordination among the physical sites. One-Stop Operator responsibilities include:

- Provide leadership for local CareerForce locations on-site operations, space configuration, customer flow and integration of services.
 - Maintain appropriate and updated publicly posted ADA posters, ensure building accessibility meets requirements and develop/address safety plans/requirements with the support of the South Central WorkForce Council.
 - Address building/facility needs, including recommending solutions related to growth and space utilization.
 - Promote CareerForce program services, internally and externally, in partnership with the South Central WorkForce.
 - Participate in partner meetings.
 - Participate in CareerForce location certification process.
 - Report operational updates and outcomes to the South Central WorkForce Council as requested.
 - Support and develop networks between workforce, economic development, education and community groups.
 - Create and maintain a welcoming and professional CareerForce environment.
 - Facilitate an inclusive services and operating environment.
 - Ensure career lab area and reception staff are trained and provide quality customer services to job seekers and employers.
 - Participate in the evaluation of customer needs and satisfaction to continually refine and improve service strategies.
 - Participate in the development and sign the Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) and infrastructure funding agreements (for example, cost allocation plans, office closing policies, dress codes, holiday scheduling, etc.).
 - Be knowledgeable of the mission and performance standards of all partners (including South Central Workforce Council) and facilitate/participate in cross-training among staff.
 - Comply with all WIOA and MN DEED regulations and policies governing the operations of a one-stop center.
- Representation of the core partners on the South Central WorkForce Council. Core partners have the opportunity to provide input and participate in the decision-making process of the SC WorkForce Council in designating the physical sites of CareerForce locations in the local area as well as participate in discussions on policy and guidelines that impact the coordination and connectivity of CareerForce locations.
 - Creative Job Search/Resume Writing and Statewide CareerForce Workshops: MN DEED in partnership with local areas has developed consistent curriculum for workshops to

ensure these workshops provide consistent quality and information throughout CareerForce locations and the workforce development system.

- South Central Training Team and Continuous Improvement Team are local teams made up of representatives from each of the core partners. These teams significantly impact connectivity and coordination through joint training sessions of core partners and continuous improvement strategies.
- Technology. Coordination and connectivity also occurs through technology, including shared data systems, access to technology for customers and communication through websites and email networks.

B.3. Describe the strategies to ensure proper connectivity and coordination among the service providers within the local workforce development area.

South Central WDA #7 has developed strong networks and partnerships with local service providers. Our partnerships include not only MN DEED and MN Valley Action Council that provide WIOA Title I services, but also includes other MN DEED divisions (i.e. VRS, Vets), Adult Basic Education, South Central College, MRCI, MET, Life-Work Planning Center (Family Resiliency Program), and Mankato Diversity Council. In addition, for career pathways, youth and other specialized programs we include other organizations in the area including local high schools, local county human services, Region 9 Development Commission, South Central Service Cooperative, MN Council of Churches, Hikmah, COPAL, Unidos, and Mankato YWCA. These organizations are included on committees and communications. Strategies to ensure connectivity and coordination among the service providers and organizations within our workforce development area include:

- As in the connectivity of the physical sites, the SC Operations Committee and One-Stop Operator services are key to connectivity and coordination among the service providers. Managers of our local partners are charged with the day-to-day operations of CareerForce locations, safety plans, review outcomes and customer feedback and implement continuous improvement strategies. A memorandum of understanding has been developed to define roles and responsibilities of the required WIOA partners.
- Managers and/or staff of each of the partners participate on SC WorkForce Council committees including the SC Career Pathways partnership, SNAP E&T partnership and Youth Council. Participation on these committees ensures partner input into planning, implementation and coordination of services for the local workforce development area.
- Each CareerForce location conducts staff meetings to ensure communication across the partners in the individual CareerForce locations.
- Professional development through the South Central Training Team. The training team is made of staff from each of the partners and addresses professional development needs that are shared across the partnership. In addition, the team focuses on building

relationships, sharing of program information across the partnership and sharing of best practices.

- The South Central Continuous Improvement Team. This team is made of staff from each of the partners and focuses on the continuous improvement of services at the three CareerForce locations. The team conducts customer surveys to obtain feedback from CareerForce customers, conducts quality assessments of services, and implements continuous improvement strategies. In addition, the team coordinates practice safety drills for severe weather awareness and fire safety awareness.
- An email communication network has been set-up to send information, announcements, job leads, training opportunities, minutes, events, newsletters, etc. out to all staff of each the partners and service providers.

B.4. Describe other strategies that will be used to maximize services and access to services, such as non-traditional hours or using partner facilities.

Strategies developed by the South Central WorkForce Council to maximize services and access to services include:

- Local CareerForce locations post information on local library hours for access to computers outside of CareerForce hours.
- MN Valley Action Council has offices in each of the six counties that do not have a CareerForce location. Each of these offices provide computers and staff to help individuals with their job search and access to MinnesotaWorks. This is especially beneficial for customers who face transportation and/or technology barriers.
- Engaging and aligning resources with area partners. We engage community partners through committees, training and resource sharing days. Referral forms and release of information forms have been developed for ease of referrals across the partners and co-enrollment when appropriate.
- The South Central Workforce Council. As the administrative entity, the South Central Workforce Council aligns resources and the expertise of each of the partners to maximize resources and services in our workforce development area.
- Providing services on a temporary basis at satellite locations for special populations or projects. This is often set-up for large mass lay-offs/business closings.
- Technology. The use of technology helps us to maintain contact with job seekers and provide case management services. We quickly learned through the pandemic how to expand remote services through technology. We continue to provide options for services through technology and support efforts at MN DEED to develop on-line services for individuals, especially for those customers with limited barriers that are not able to

self-serve. Remote services provide an opportunity for customers to engage with services and workshops at hours that are most convenient for them.

- Hybrid training options are provided through our education partners to increase access to training services. Often, these on-line learning options are important for customers that do not have consistent access to transportation or are looking for training available during hours that are convenient for them.
- Ensure customers have access to technology through partnerships with PCs for People, local libraries and office locations in each county. Access to technology training is available through local community education and Adult Basic Education programs.

B.5. Describe the strategic approaches to ensure all elements of Career Services are available at service locations or online, including services for youth and individuals with barriers to employment or service access.

WIOA career services are defined in TEGL 3-15 as:

Basic Career Services – available to all individuals seeking services

- Eligibility determination;
- Outreach, intake and orientation;
- Initial assessment of skill levels and supportive service needs;
- Labor exchange services including: job search, job placement and provision of in-demand industry and occupation information and nontraditional employment opportunities;
- Referrals to other programs and services;
- Provision of workforce and labor market information;
- Provision of performance and program cost information on eligible training providers;
- Provision of information on how the local area is performing on local performance measures;
- Provision of information on the availability of supportive services or assistance and appropriate referrals;
- Assistance in establishing eligibility for programs of financial aid assistance for training and education programs not provided under WIOA; and
- Provision of information and assistance regarding filing claims under UI programs.

Individualized Career Services – available when appropriate to obtain or retain employment.

- Comprehensive and specialized assessment;
- Individualized employment plan;
- Group or individualized counseling;
- Career planning/case management;
- Short-term pre-vocational services;

- Internships and work experiences;
- Workforce preparation activities;
- Financial literacy services;
- Out-of-area job search;
- English language acquisition and integrated education/training programs; and
- Follow-up Services.

The South Central WorkForce Council conducts a Request for Proposal (RFP) process to identify providers for WIOA Adult and DW services. The RFP requires that responders provide all of the above career services at all local CareerForce locations. MN DEED –Job Service has been selected to provide Basic Career Services. They are uniquely positioned to be able to align WIOA and Wagner Peyser funding and services to ensure these services are available at all sites and for all populations. Individualized Career Services will be provided by both MN DEED –Job Service and MN Valley Action Council depending on whether employment strategies are work-based (MN DEED –Job Service) or classroom-based (MVAC). The South Central WorkForce Council staff monitor sites on an annual basis to ensure quality services are available at service locations and for individuals with barriers to employment. In addition, the Memorandum of Understanding also delineates across the partnership and WIOA titles the providers of career services. A separate RFP is conducted for WIOA Youth services. The RFP requires that all service elements are available for youth. MN Valley Action Council has been selected to provide WIOA Youth services through the RFP process. Again, WorkForce Council staff monitor sites on an annual basis to ensure services are available at service locations and for individuals with barriers to employment. The South Central WorkForce Council reviews service levels and outcomes for individuals with barriers to employment on an annual basis. Services are provided through a number of strategic approaches including: one-on-one, on-line and CareerForce workshops. Under our Regional and local plan we will be focusing on serving individuals experiencing employment disparities and will review processes and services to ensure that all elements of Career Services are readily accessible to all populations including youth and individuals with barriers to employment or service access. Finally, we have developed processes to provide remote access to services that has increased our capacity for delivering on-line services and increased access to services for youth and individuals with barriers to employment that have access to technology.

- B.6. Describe how the local area board will facilitate access to services provided through the one-stop delivery system, including in remote areas, through the use of technology and other means.

The South Central WorkForce Council and its providers continues to explore the use of technology and other means to facilitate access to services, especially for rural areas of our WDA. The use of technology helps us to maintain contact with job seekers, provide case management services and provides easy access to services for those individuals who are able to

self-serve. A positive outcome of the pandemic is the accelerated development and use of technology to continue services while our CareerForce locations were closed to the public. Assistive technology provides better access to services for individuals with disabilities. Strategies to facilitate access to services through technology and other means include:

- Assessing job seekers' access to technology and digital literacy skills. Programs like PCs for People, referrals and/or support services are utilized to provide access to technology when needed. Referrals are made to Adult Basic Education when appropriate to help individuals with limited computer skills. Adult Basic Education utilizes North Star Digital Literacy curriculum to assess and teach basic computer skills.
- The provision of Creative Job Search, Resume Writing, New Leaf and other workshops on-line.
- Access to MinnesotaWorks and the CareerForce platform on-line.
- Access to Unemployment Insurance on-line and/or by telephone.
- The delivery and completion of applications and screening tools through technology.
- Utilization of email, texting, and social media for enhanced communication with participants, limiting the number of times an individual has to travel to our offices.
- Development of videos for our work with local high schools that feature local employers on career exploration and job search.
- We developed the "Get Started Program" which is a virtual, four-week program focused on preparing youth for the world of work. "Get Started" provides youth and young adults (ages 16-24) training in communication skills, budgeting, health/wellness, and community exploration, which are fundamentals in being successful in life and employment. Youth learn about the importance of effective workplace communication, how to budget their money, the impacts of health and wellness on employment, and location community resources that are available.
- Our high schools, ABE, and post-secondary partners continue to increase opportunities for on-line learning. There are now many hybrid learning opportunities available through our education partners.
- Continue to support MN DEED in the development of on-line services including job search tools, workshops, and mobile phone applications.
- Providers utilize a variety of technology formats to engage with program participants including the Workforce One Connect App, Teams and Zoom for virtual meetings, Google forms to start the application process, and DocuSign for electronic signatures.

B.7. Describe how the one-stop centers are implementing and transitioning to an integrated, technology-enabled intake and case management information system for programs carried out under WIOA and programs carried out by one-stop partners.

As a rural WDA with limited resources and staff, we rely heavily on MN DEED for advances in utilizing technology for intake and case management information system. We do not have the

resources or staff expertise to develop information systems outside of Workforce One. In addition, we believe true integration of data systems across one-stop partners is also an advancement that needs to happen at the state level. With that said, the South Central WorkForce Council supports the continued development and utilization of technology to increase access and efficiency as follows:

- Provides the resources to fund a MIS position with MN Valley Action Council to provide Workforce One services that centralizes training and support for users of Workforce One in the local area.
- Supports the utilization of electronic participant records/files. This development began with our MFIP/DWP programs and expanded to the WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker and Youth programs. We will continue to support our service providers in utilizing electronic participant files for all programming.
- One-stop partners (including WIOA providers) have transitioned to the utilization of email, texting, and social media for enhanced communication with customers.
- The development of data-sharing agreements between one-stop partners and programs. A specific data-sharing agreement has been developed with the key partners of our career pathway programs so data can be easily shared between the different systems for ABE, Minnesota State and CareerForce partners.
- The development of a career pathway application that integrates the data needs of the ABE and workforce data systems.
- South Central WorkForce Council and one-stop partner staff have been active participants on statewide efforts at MN DEED to advance and integrate the utilization of technology. This includes statewide Workforce One committees, task forces to develop a common intake forms, case management tools, statewide workshops, and mobile-phone applications.

B.8. Describe how supportive services, such as transportation and other needs, will be coordinated to better serve individuals with specific barriers to training, education and employment.

The provision of supportive services is a key tool in addressing barriers and supporting customer success and retention in training/education and employment. Transportation is by far the greatest support service need in our rural WDA with limited public transportation. All individuals enrolled in WIOA programs are assigned a case manager/navigator who is knowledgeable on community resources available and coordinates the provision of support services. Potential support service needs are discussed and identified during the assessment process. Other support service needs are identified as barriers occur during service provision. Case managers/navigators work closely with other partners to coordinate the provision of support services including human services, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and community

organizations such as MN Valley Action Council, Lutheran Social Services and Salvation Army. Strong partnerships in the local area allow staff to identify the expertise and resources of partners and allow them to align services, resources, and avoid duplication. Individuals experiencing food and/or housing insecurity are referred to appropriate resources in the area including housing programs (i.e. Section 8) and local food shelves. Support services are provided for these needs on a limited and emergency basis. Access to technology is a great need as education/training programs as well as CareerForce services are offered in-person or remote to accommodate individual needs. Individuals who lack access to technology are referred to PCs to People. In addition, computers and access to Wi-Fi are provided through local libraries; however, in rural areas their hours and staff support are limited. When necessary and on a limited basis, we will utilize resources to support the acquisition of technology when necessary to complete a training/employment plan. A regional policy has been developed for the purchase of computers/technology for customers. A regional policy has been developed for the provision of support services in our WDA.

The South Central WorkForce Council supports the development of directories of resources to provide information on a broad array of services provided in our local area and is available on-line or copies are also available in our CareerForce resource areas for all customers. These directories can be found at: www.workforcecouncil.org.

CareerForce Operations - Accessibility

B.9. Describe strategies that will be used to leverage technology for services and ensure compliance with accessibility standards.

South Central continues to explore and expand the use of technology for services in order to provide services that meets the diverse needs of our customers and to expand access to services to job seekers and employers. The strategies used to leverage technology were describe above and include:

- Assessing job seekers' access to technology and digital literacy skills. Programs like PCs for People, referrals and/or support services are utilized to provide access to technology when needed. Referrals are made to Adult Basic Education when appropriate to help individuals with limited computer skills. Adult Basic Education utilizes North Star Digital Literacy curriculum to assess and teach basic computer skills.
- The provision of Creative Job Search, Resume Writing, New Leaf and other workshops on-line.
- Access to MinnesotaWorks and the CareerForce platform on-line.
- Access to Unemployment Insurance on-line and/or by telephone.
- The delivery and completion of applications and screening tools through technology.
- Utilization of email, texting, and social media for enhanced communication with participants, limiting the number of times an individual has to travel to our offices.

- Development of videos for our work with local high schools that feature local employers on career exploration and job search.
- We developed the “Get Started Program” which is a virtual, four-week program focused on preparing youth for the world of work. “Get Started” provides youth and young adults (ages 16-24) training in communication skills, budgeting, health/wellness, and community exploration, which are fundamentals in being successful in life and employment. Youth learn about the importance of effective workplace communication, how to budget their money, the impacts of health and wellness on employment, and location community resources that are available.
- Our high schools, ABE, and post-secondary partners continue to increase opportunities for on-line learning. There are now many hybrid learning opportunities available through our education partners.
- Continue to support MN DEED in the development of on-line services including job search tools, workshops, and mobile phone applications.
- Providers utilize a variety of technology formats to engage with program participants including the Workforce One Connect App, Teams and Zoom for virtual meetings, Google forms to start the application process, and DocuSign for electronic signatures.

We ensure compliance with accessibility standards by:

- Requiring accessibility compliance in all our contracts/subcontract agreements.
- Providing accessibility in each of our CareerForce locations through assistive technology such as: Jaws, Zoomtext, Nextalk, Pocket Talker, TTY, and Language Line.
- Adhering to the regional language access plan developed in partnership with Southwest MN Private Industry Council and MN DEED Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity. Providing language assistance services when necessary such as interpreter services when meeting with individuals with limited English skills.
- Partnering closely with MN DEED Vocational Rehabilitation Services and State Services for the Blind to utilize their expertise in ensuring accessibility compliance and access to services for individuals with disabilities.
- Conduct annual on-site accessibility/ADA compliance reviews in partnership with MN DEED Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity to assure that our CareerForce locations and offices are in compliance with accessibility requirements.

B.10. Describe the replicated cooperative agreements (as defined in section 107(d)(11) of WIOA) between the local area board or other local entities described in section 101(a)(11)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 721(a)(11)(B)) and the local office of a designated state agency or designated state unit administering programs carried out under title I of such Act (29 U.S.C. 720 et seq.) (other than section 112 or part C of that title (29 U.S.C. 732, 741) and subject to section 121(f)) in accordance with section 101(a)(11) of such Act (29 U.S.C. 721(a)(11) with respect to efforts that will

enhance the provision of services to individuals with disabilities and to other individuals, such as cross training of staff, technical assistance, use and sharing of information, cooperative efforts with employers, and other efforts at cooperation, collaboration, and coordination.

The South Central Workforce Council, Vocational Rehabilitation Services and core partners under WIOA enter into a cooperative Memorandum of Understanding. The Memorandum of Understanding delineates the roles and responsibilities of the core partners and how services will be coordinated and delivered; how costs will be shared across the core partners; methods of referral between the core partners; and methods to ensure the needs of youth and individuals with barriers to employment are addressed. The last Memorandum of Understanding was signed by core partners in June 2020. An updated MOU is in development and is expected to be completed by prior to June 30, 2024.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services collaborates with core partners to enhance services to individuals with disabilities and for individuals with other barriers to employment. Vocational Rehabilitation Services are co-located with core partners in all three CareerForce locations in the local area. CareerForce staff provide an orientation to the full array of services available through core partners to assist job seekers in making an informed decision on choice of service provider.

All core partner staff participate in training days to ensure they understand the services offered by the various partners, the eligibility criteria for each program and to address common training needs. Examples of collaboration with Vocational Rehabilitation Services includes:

- A Vocational Rehabilitation Services representative serves on the South Central WorkForce Council.
- Vocational Rehabilitation Services staff serve on the South Central Career Pathways Partnership, the Operations Committee, and the Youth Council.
- Vocational Rehabilitation Services staff serve on the SC Training Team and the SC Continuous Improvement Team.
- Vocational Rehabilitation Services staff serve on the Tour of Manufacturing planning committee.
- Referral forms and data sharing forms have been developed to assist in collaboration of services with shared customers.
- Strong coordination and collaboration was developed under the Youth DEI grant. Although this grant focused on youth programming, the collaborations that were developed continues under all programs. South Central participated in a joint grant application with MN DEED and other workforce development areas for another Youth DEI grant opportunity to continue building this work.
- Vocational Rehabilitation Services Manager services as the ADA Coordinator for the local WDA and assists with ADA compliance reviews and provides expertise for the local area.

- B.11. Describe how entities within the one-stop delivery system will comply with section 188 of WIOA, if applicable, and applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, regarding the physical and programmatic accessibility of facilities, programs and services, technology and materials for individuals with disabilities including providing staff training and support for addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities.

All core partners of our CareerForce locations comply with section 188 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, regarding the physical and programmatic accessibility of facilities, programs and services, technology and materials for individuals with disabilities including providing staff training and support for addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities. The local EO officer, ADA Coordinator and MN DEED completes annual ADA compliance reviews. The local centers are equipped with the required accessible equipment, software and technology to meet the requirements of ADA and are regularly monitored for compliance. Materials utilized in providing services includes language indicating that it is available in other formats. Websites are developed screen reader compatible. All contracts/subcontracts includes language requiring ADA compliance. Core partners and local EEO officer participate in MN DEED training provided by the Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity. Our Vocational Rehabilitation Services partner provides local ADA Coordination, expertise and is available for technical assistance.

CareerForce Operations – EEO Compliance

- B.12. The local workforce development area and their partners are aware of the responsibilities of the Equal Opportunity Officer, including attending DEED sponsored EO Training?

Yes X

- B.13. The local workforce development area is aware of and conducts annually a physical and program accessibility review.

Yes X

- B.14. Does the local workforce development area have in place an agreed upon WIOA Discrimination complaint process per the [regulations](#)?

Yes X

B.15. Does the local workforce development area have in place an agreed upon WIOA Program Complaint Policy per the [regulations](#)?

Yes X

B.16. Does the local workforce development area have in place a [language access policy and plan](#)? Describe your local workforce development areas language access policy. If you do not have a policy in place, use the following link as a guide in creating your policy [Language Access Assessment and Planning Tool for Federally Conducted and Federally Assisted Programs \(lep.gov\)](#). This link on pages 9-15 includes sample assessments, questions and information on: 1) Understanding how LEP individuals interact with your agency; 2) Identification and assessment of LEP Communities; 3) Providing language assistance services; 4) Training of staff on policies and procedures; 5) Providing notice of language assistance services. Should you have questions pertaining to your LWDA's language access policy contact the Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity at DEED.ODEO@state.mn.us

Yes X

The purpose of the WIOA Region 5 Language Access Policy is to provide guidance and establish procedures for ensuring that limited English proficient (LEP) customers are being provided meaningful access to program information, activities and services and are able to participate effectively regardless of their ability to speak, read, write or understand English. The policy outlines reasonable steps to ensure meaningful access, explains the process we use to identify LEP populations and need, the language assistance services available, and how that will be monitored. A copy of our Language Access Plan can be found on our website at: <https://www.workforcecouncil.org/regional-local-policies/>

B.17. Describe the affirmative outreach strategies your local workforce development area will employ to recruit participants that are representative of the populations in your region. (You may also attach an outreach or engagement plan if one exists for your LWDA).

Affirmative outreach strategies in South Central aim to engage and recruit participants from diverse backgrounds, ensuring representation of the populations in the region. Here's a comprehensive approach:

Targeted Marketing Campaigns: Develop marketing materials to connect with diverse populations and share information about available programs and services. Utilize multiple methods to distribute information such as social media, videos and flyers. Engage with community leaders to amplify outreach efforts and reach new audiences.

Community Partnerships: Collaborate with local community organizations, non-profits, religious institutions, and cultural centers that serve diverse populations. These partnerships can provide access to target groups and help build trust within the community.

Language Accessibility: Ensure that all outreach materials and communications are available in multiple languages commonly spoken in the region. This includes translated outreach materials as well as labor market infographics.

Cultural Competency Training: Train staff members to be culturally competent and sensitive to the needs of diverse populations. This includes understanding different cultural norms, communication styles, and barriers to employment that may exist within various communities.

Accessibility Accommodations: Ensure that all services are accessible to individuals with disabilities. Provide accommodations such as sign language interpreter and alternative formats for materials.

Engagement with Educational Institutions: Partner with local schools, colleges, and universities to reach out to students and recent graduates from diverse backgrounds. Offer career counseling services, internship opportunities, and job placement assistance to help young people enter the workforce.

Customer Feedback: Establish feedback mechanisms to solicit input from participants and community members on the effectiveness of outreach efforts. Use this feedback to continuously improve and refine strategies to better serve the needs of diverse populations.

Diverse Representation: Ensure that boards, committees and staff reflects the diversity of the community. As staff, committee and board vacancies occur we will continue to seek diverse individuals to fill those vacancies.

CareerForce Partners

B.18. Describe the roles and resource contributions of the one-stop partners.

The Memorandum of Understanding with one-stop partners delineates the roles of each of the required partners of our CareerForce locations. The IFAs which identify the resource contributions of the required one-stop partners & programs. Both of these documents are under development and are expected to be completed by June 30, 2024. Copies of the executed documents will be submitted once final approval has been obtained from all partners.

B.19. Describe how the local area board will ensure continuous improvement of eligible providers of services through the system.

The South Central WorkForce Council has established two partnership teams that address continuous improvement and staff development needs of our core partners: the South Central Training Team and the SC Continuous Improvement Team.

The South Central Training Team is made up of staff from the core partners to address the training needs of partnership agencies including: ABE, Job Service, Life-Work Planning Center, Minnesota Valley Action Council, MRCI, Rehabilitation Services, and Services for the Blind. The team assesses the training needs of our CareerForce partners and provides training that addresses the needs that are common across the partnership. Training days are held twice a year for all partnership staff. These training days are noteworthy in that the agendas are driven by the staff of our CareerForce partnership, addresses partnership development and continuous improvement through training.

The SC Continuous Improvement Team, again made up of representatives of our CareerForce partnership, deals with quality issues. The team conducts assessments of the system, obtains feedback from our customers and staff, and develops and implements continuous improvement plans that address quality issues.

The SC WorkForce Council conducts an annual review of program results. The Council not only reviews results of WIOA Title I programs, but also the results of the CareerForce partners. MN DEED and SC WorkForce Council staff conduct on-site monitoring of WIOA and MFIP service providers on an annual basis. These monitoring reviews provide an opportunity to identify and address areas of continuous improvement.

Focus groups have been conducted with participants of our career pathway programs and youth programs to obtain feedback and input on how to improve programming. New strategies and processes were put into place based on this feedback.

Rural youth providers meet on a regular basis to discuss implementation of youth programs and to share best practices. There are plans to coordinate similar meetings with Adult and DW providers.

Finally, each partnering agency provides staff development specific to their agency needs. This includes participating in local, state (MN DEED, MN DHS, and MAWB) and national training opportunities. Through MAWB Job Seeker Services Committee, best practices are shared across the 16 local WDAs.

- B.20.** Describe the local workforce development area's processes to assure non-duplicative services and avoid duplicate administrative costs.

The South Central WorkForce Council places a high priority on our role to convene and develop strong relationships with local workforce development area partners and to aligning the expertise and resources of these partners to avoid duplication and achieve our strategic vision and goals.

Alignment of service delivery is required under our service delivery structure. The SC WorkForce Council conducts the RFP process based on services, rather than programs. The service providers are selected based on the expertise to deliver basic career services, individualized career services, work-based training and/or classroom training. MN DEED and MN Valley Action

Council are the WIOA Title I service providers. To avoid duplication, providers have clear roles and responsibilities in the service delivery model. MN DEED conducts outreach, intake, eligibility, job search assistance and work-based training activities and MN Valley Action Council provides the classroom training services.

The Joint Powers Board, the South Central WorkForce Council and MN Valley Action Council have an established agreement where roles and responsibilities are delineated. As the fiscal agent, MN Valley Action Council provides the payroll, bookkeeping and accounting services.

In addition, we align administrative processes with the Southwest workforce board to avoid duplication and maximize efficiencies including: developing regional policies, respond to grant opportunities as a region, joint marketing strategies, joint professional development training, regional monitoring on an annual basis and joint legislative visits.

B.21. Describe how the Memorandum of Understanding will be or has been developed and used to ensure commitment of resources from service providers and required partners.

The South Central WorkForce Council, with the agreement of the Joint Powers Board, will develop and enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with required partners. Provisions of the agreement will include:

- Services and how they will be coordinated and delivered through the local workforce development system;
- How the cost of services and operating costs will be funded;
- Methods of referral between required partners;
- Methods to ensure the needs of youth and individuals with barriers to employment are addressed; and
- The duration of the memorandum of understanding.

The local Infrastructure Funding Agreements (IFAs) are an addendum to the Memorandum of Understanding which delineates each required partners/programs' commitment of resources. Both of these documents are under development and are expected to be completed by June 30, 2024. Copies of the executed documents will be submitted once final approval has been obtained from all partners.

B.22. Describe how local area boards will ensure state policies on infrastructure funding requirements are adhered to and the process for addressing any discrepancies or disagreements.

The South Central WorkForce Council facilitates the development of the Memorandum of Understanding and Infrastructure Funding Agreements (IFAs) for required partners of our CareerForce locations utilizing state policies as a guidance to fairly distribute infrastructure

costs. Local IFAs are developed to identify a fair and equitable method to disburse shared costs at CareerForce locations for co-located partners/programs. Shared costs include items such as staffing of the career labs and reception, and infrastructure costs such as space, telephone and data lines. Costs are allocated based on staffing levels and dedicated space of each partner. Required partners that are not co-located at CareerForce locations are also contacted for their contribution to the IFAs. These partners may contribute to the IFA through cash, in-kind or third party contributions. Once the IFAs are completed, all required partners sign the final document. Historically, we have not had any major disagreements in adopting the IFAs due to the fair and equitable method of disbursing costs. If disagreements do occur with local partners it would be brought to the Executive Committee of the South Central Workforce Council for local resolution. If the dispute cannot be resolved locally it would be brought to the Governor/MN DEED designee for resolution or adoption of state funding mechanism.

- B.23. Describe how local area boards, who contract out for provider services, will ensure that providers fully participate in infrastructure funding requirements and the alignment of service delivery within the local workforce development area 134(c)(3)(G) of WIOA.

Every four years the South Central WorkForce Council conducts a Request for Proposal (RFP) process for the delivery of youth, adult and dislocated worker services. Within the RFP packages it indicates that all successful responders must deliver services at each of the area's CareerForce locations and that adult and dislocated worker funds will not be used to support the infrastructure costs of any other facilities. In addition, the RFP indicates successful proposers are required to meet all rules, regulations and policies developed by the U.S. Department of Labor, MN Department of Employment and Economic Development and the South Central WorkForce Council, including state policies on infrastructure funding. Once providers are identified through the RFP process, a subcontract for services is developed that indicates that the service provider will adhere to the Local Plan and all rules, regulations and policies of the U.S. Department of Labor, MN DEED and the South Central WorkForce Council. Alignment of service delivery is required under our service delivery structure. The SC WorkForce Council RFP is conducted based on specific services versus a program-based RFP model. The SC WorkForce Council awards contracts based on the expertise of proposers to deliver basic career services, individualized career services, work-based training and/or classroom training. Woven within our service delivery structure is the need to align service delivery. For example, one provider may conduct intake and eligibility and then that provider must work closely with the provider delivering classroom training services.

- B.24. Describe the competitive process to be used to award the sub-grants and contracts in the local workforce development area for activities carried out under section 107(d)(16) WIOA.

The South Central WorkForce Council conducts a formal Request for Proposal (RFP) process to identify the service deliverers of WIOA Youth, WIOA Adult, WIOA Dislocated Worker and State Dislocated Worker/MYP programs. The process begins by the development of an RFP Task

Force. The Task Force includes SC WorkForce Council members and staff. All Task Force members are required to sign a Conflict of Interest/Nondisclosure Statement prior to their participation. The RFP Task Force evaluates current service delivery and identifies changes to be made to the system and/or services to efficiently and effectively deliver services to our customers. A Request for Proposal package is developed and published requesting potential providers to detail how they will fulfill the requirements for services and expected outcomes. Publishing of the RFP includes a notice in three legal newspapers, a notice on our website, letters sent to area organizations/agencies, other identified providers of workforce development programs and notification to those that request to be on our RFP list. The Task Force reviews and evaluates the responses. Evaluation criteria includes:

- Identification of Need
- Services (including: Career Services, Training Services and Career Pathway Navigator services)
- Commitment to Partnership/CareerForce Center System
- Performance Outcomes
- Budget/Costs –including cost/price analysis
- Operational Capability

Based on evaluation results the RFP Task Force develops a recommendation that is submitted to the South Central WorkForce Council and Joint Powers Board for approval. The RFP process for youth services was completed in January 2024. The RFP process for Adult and Dislocated Worker services was completed in March 2024.

- B.25. Describe and identify the entity responsible for the disbursement of grant funds described in section 107(d)(12)(B)(i)(III) of WIOA.

As allowed under the WIOA law under section 107(d)(12)(B)(ii), the South Central Workforce Development Area Joint Powers Board has designated Minnesota Valley Action Council, Inc. as the local grant subrecipient for the disbursement of grant funds. This designation was approved by all nine local county board of commissioners through the approval of the workforce development area Joint Powers Agreement. In addition, roles and responsibilities are delineated in the approved agreement between the Joint Powers Board, the South Central WorkForce Council and Minnesota Valley Action Council. These agreements are in place through June 30, 2028 in alignment with the four year planning process. Minnesota Valley Action Council has over 30 years of experience in receiving and disbursing state and federal resources. Under the most recent audit, MN Valley Action Council continues to have no issues or questioned costs.

Levels of Performance

- B.26. Describe how the local levels of performance negotiated with the Governor and chief elected official will be used to measure the performance of the local workforce development area and to be used by the local area board for measuring the

performance of the local fiscal agent, eligible providers under subtitle B of WIOA and the One-stop delivery system.

Negotiated performance standards are one key way in which the South Central WorkForce Council measures the performance of the local workforce development area, providers and the one-stop delivery system. On a quarterly basis, performance progress is reviewed and reported to DEED through quarterly reports. South Central WorkForce Council staff reviews the rosters behind the results with service providers to ensure that services and outcomes have been correctly coded on Workforce One. The South Central WorkForce Council reviews final results on an annual basis of services providers and CareerForce partners. If deficiencies exist, the board works with service providers to identify strategies to increase performance. The fiscal agent performance is reviewed through a monthly review of the general ledgers, a monthly fund review with service providers, on-site monitoring by MN DEED and an end of the year review of financial statements and audit. In addition to performance measures, the board also conducts a thorough review, on an annual basis, of demographics, services, trends, training occupations and outcomes of service providers, as well as on-site monitoring visits where case files are reviewed for compliance and quality of services.

B.27. Describe the actions the local area board will take toward becoming or remaining a high-performing board, consistent with the factors developed by the state board.

The Governor's Workforce Development Board (GWDB) has established four criteria for high-performing workforce development boards:

1. Embrace and communicate the vision for workforce development.
2. Support and lead employer-led quality sector partnerships.
3. Prioritize solutions for racial and economic disparities in education and employment.
4. Achieve outcomes and results through alignment with system partners and leveraging of federal, state and philanthropic resources.

The structural and operational actions of the South Central WorkForce Council to be a high-performing board based on the criteria above includes:

Embrace and Communicate the Vision for Workforce Development Our regional partnership and SC Workforce Council has adopted the State vision statement as our regional and local vision statement aligning with the state, region and economic development. As a region and local board we have established regional goals to drive the vision. Our goals drive our board, committee and partnership structure and priorities. Vision and goals are communicated with key stakeholders, especially through committee and partnership meetings. These committees/partnerships are charged with implementing action plans developed for each of our goals. Committees and partnerships include:

- Youth Council: This committee includes multiple youth stakeholders including employers, labor unions, CareerForce partners, education partners, and community stakeholders and works on addressing Goal 1 – Increase high school student's understanding of and exposure to regional occupations in demand.
- SC Career Pathway Partnership: This committee includes multiple stakeholders including employers, CareerForce partners, education partners, and community partners and works to address Goal 2 – Expand the number of skilled workers through sector-based career pathway approaches in key industries.
- Employer-led Sector-Partnerships: Our Health Care Sector Partnership and Manufacturing Sector Partnership will be instrumental in addressing Goal 2 – Expand the number of skilled workers through sector-based career pathway approaches in key industries.
- Regional Workgroup: This partnership is focused on Goal 3 – Provide training and assistance to help businesses retain and attract the diverse workforce they need now and into the future.

Build Support and Lead Employer-led High Quality Sector Partnerships The South Central WorkForce Council has established two employer-led sector partnerships based on LMI that identifies these industries as the two largest industries in the region: Health Care and Manufacturing. These sector partnerships are facilitated by our MN DEED Workforce Strategy Consultant and identifies key workforce issues for the specific industry and strategies/solutions to address the issues. This input from employers not only leads our workforce development strategies for these specific sectors, but also informs the board in the development of our regional/local plan and goals/strategies. Key strategies identified by these industry sectors include: developing a skilled workforce, developing connections with local high schools, and attracting talent pipeline to key industries in the region. These strategies have been incorporated into the strategies and goals for the region. The WorkForce Council and Regional Leadership Team assess our progress on these goals and continue to expand our partnerships with local employers.

Prioritize Solutions for Racial and Economic Disparities in Education & Employment The South Central WorkForce Council in partnership with Southwest MN has established a regional strategies for increasing program outcomes for individuals experiencing employment disparities. Strategies include:

- Increasing diverse representation on boards, committees and staff.
- Increase partnerships with organizations serving diverse populations.
- Targeted marketing to populations experiencing disparities.
- Conduct focus groups/discussions with ethnic communities.
- Identify & implement service strategies specific to unique needs of targeted populations, utilizing career pathway programming for demand occupations.
- Create a welcoming environment and services at CareerForce locations.

- Develop a professional development plan and offer training on cultural competency for staff, board members and employers.
- Measure and evaluate service levels and outcomes for populations experiencing employment disparities.

Achieve Outcomes and Results through Alignment with System Partners and Leveraging of Federal, State and Philanthropic Resources The South Central WorkForce Council utilizes data to inform our strategic plan including labor market information on the local/regional area and real-time knowledge of employers and stakeholders. The plan and our service delivery structure aligns the expertise and resources of system/area partners. The WorkForce Council leverages additional resources as needed to help us implement and achieve our goals. This may include leveraging partner resources/alignment of existing resources and seeking grants that align with our goals. This is especially evidence through our one-stop delivery system and through our career pathway approach where the expertise and resources of multiple partners are aligned to meet the workforce development needs of job seekers and employers. Indicators of achievement are established for the partners, progress is monitored through our committee structure on a quarterly basis and annual results are reviewed by the board in order to establish continuous improvement strategies.

Local Workforce Board Governance

- B.28. Briefly describe the local area board's policy and timetable for filling vacancies, replacing/reappointing individuals whose terms have come to an end. Include in your description any plans to fill the terms that will be expiring as of June 30, 2024.

The Joint Powers Board shall appoint the members of the South Central WorkForce Council through the following procedures. Workforce Council members vacating their position notify the WorkForce Council Chair or WorkForce Council Executive Director in writing. When the vacated position is from the private sector, business organizations are contacted and asked to nominate a business owner, executive or manager for the vacated position. Priority will be given to nominees from counties who are not currently represented on the WorkForce Council. Nominations are submitted to the WorkForce Council Executive Director, who in turn submits them to the Joint Powers Board. Nominees are solicited who have optimum policymaking or hiring authority. The Joint Powers Board reviews the nominees and appoints one nominee for each vacant position. Selecting public sector members is handled in the same fashion, except that letters are sent requesting nominations from organizations appropriate to the position. For education, contact is made to Adult Basic Education and post-secondary schools. For labor, contact is made with State and local labor unions. For economic development, contact is made with regional and local economic development organizations. For representatives of CareerForce partners, contact is made with the local managers. For community based organizations, contact is made with local community based organizations. For Human Services,

the regional human services directors are asked to nominate a representative. Each year prior to our June meeting, we review the roster of our WorkForce Council members to identify terms that are coming to end. Staff reach out to each of the WorkForce Council members regarding their interest in continuing for another term or vacating their position.

B.29. Is your local area board currently in compliance with WIOA?

Yes _____

No _____

If No, what steps will be taken to bring your local area board into compliance by June 30, 2024?

B.16. Please include in Attachment B the composition of your board, including the sectors represented on the board, and to the extent practicable, the demographic makeup of your board.

Please see Attachment C as well as Attachment 3 for industry sector and county represented on the board.

SECTION C: PROGRAM AND SERVICE DELIVERY

Local Area Board Program and Service Delivery

C.1. Describe how the local area board, working with the entities carrying out core programs will expand access to employment opportunities for eligible individuals, particularly eligible individuals with barriers to employment.

The SC WorkForce Council, in the alignment of resources and expertise in our local area, recognize the expertise of MN DEED –Job Service and their connection to local employers and employment opportunities through Wagner Peyser labor exchange services, Workforce Strategy Consultant, MinnesotaWorks and the CareerForce platform. As a result, the South Central WorkForce Council contracts with MN DEED to provide job search and placement services, as well as work-based training opportunities such as on-the-job training, incumbent worker training, and work experience/NEG employment. These work-based training opportunities lead to expanded employment opportunities for the individuals we serve; they especially assist in getting a “foot in the door” for individuals with structural barriers to employment.

The Council also aligns with WIOA Title I providers, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Services for the Blind, Veteran Employment Services, MN Valley Action Council Youth Programs, and MRCI that connects with local employers to provide work-based learning and employment opportunities for targeted populations including: individuals with disabilities, veterans, BIPOC populations, youth, high school drop-outs, teen parents and low income populations.

Relationships developed with local employers on our board, committees, sector partnerships and industry initiatives expands our access to employers and employment opportunities. These relationships helps us to identify the skill needs of employers and employment opportunities in the area. As we work with eligible individuals with barriers to employment, we are able to direct them and assist with obtaining the skills they need to compete for these employment opportunities.

A coalition of staff from partners including: WorkForce Council, MN DEED, SC Service Cooperative and MN Valley Action Council meet regularly to coordinate outreach activities to area employers for work-based learning activities and employment for youth.

- C.2. Describe how the local area board, working with the entities carrying out core programs, will expand access to supportive services for eligible individuals, particularly eligible individuals with barriers to employment.

Within our broad partnership, workforce development support service funding is one of the most stable and consistent sources to support training and employment retention and success. However, whenever other community resources are available to address barriers, referrals are made to expand access to supportive services. Other entities that we partner with for expanded access to supportive services for individuals with barriers to employment include: Vocational Rehabilitation Services, MN Family Investment Program, Diversionary Work Program, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Child Care Assistance Program, Medical Assistance, MN Sure, Salvation Army, Lutheran Social Services, MN Council of Churches, VINE, MN Valley Action Council, SMILES, PCs for People, Section 8, area thrift stores, county human service emergency funds, churches and food shelves. Transportation continues to be the greatest need and the focus for utilizing WIOA support services as public transportation is limited and there are limited other resources that provide transportation assistance. We utilize many of the programs listed above for individuals with food and housing insecurities. The SC WorkForce Council and partners will continue to expand partnerships with area community organizations to increase access to support services in the local area.

- C.3. Describe how the local area board will facilitate the development of career pathways, co-enrollments (as appropriate) and activities that lead to industry recognized post-secondary credentials that are portable and stackable.

The South Central WorkForce Council has been convening local partners for over fourteen years in the development of career pathways for our local area. Under WIOA, we have expanded career pathways to a regional approach working closely with the Southwest MN WDA in the continuation and expansion of our career pathway programming. We currently have developed career pathways for the agriculture, construction, education, health care, manufacturing and transportation industries.

In general, our career pathway approach includes:

- Alignment with the skill needs of key industries and employers in region;
- Aligning the expertise and resources of employers, ABE, post-secondary education, community and workforce partners;
- Career counseling, career navigation and support services;
- On-Ramp programming that includes contextualized basic skills instruction, career exploration, and certifications.
- Bridge programming that includes contextualized basic skills instruction, exposure to industry-specific careers, an introduction to basic occupational skills and results in an industry-recognized stackable credential/certification;
- Enhanced academic instruction that integrates post-secondary career and technical education with ABE instructional support and reinforcement of skill concepts that results in stackable credits and credentials along a career pathway;
- Work-based learning opportunities including: clinicals, internships and apprenticeships;
- Working with post-secondary education to provide credit for prior learning;
- Placement and retention services; and
- Career laddering opportunities.

Technical skills training under career pathways is credit-based training allowing individuals to apply for and utilize financial aid. Whenever feasible, the majority of individuals are co-enrolled in workforce development programs to provide tuition and support service assistance. These programs include: WIOA Adult, WIOA Youth, State or Federal Dislocated Worker programs, or Vocational Rehabilitation Services. The Career Navigator is responsible for identifying and aligning resources to maximize career and training services. We have worked with South Central College to develop portable and stackable credentials. Individuals in the health care pathway earn a Nursing Assistant certification which is required credits and credential for a number of health care pathways. Under manufacturing, individuals earn a MSSC certification after their first semester which is required certification and credits for the machining, mechatronics and welding pathways.

C.4. Describe and assess the type and availability of adult and dislocated worker employment and training activities in the local workforce development area.

The full complement of adult and dislocated worker employment and training activities as required under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act are available through our CareerForce locations in WDA #7. Providers of services were selected through a Request for Proposal process. Services will be provided through a partnership between MN DEED –Job Service and MN Valley Action Council, focusing on the strengths of each organization.

Services available include:

Basic Career Services

Basic Career Services is provided by MN DEED –Job Service. Job Service is uniquely positioned and qualified to provide these services as the Wagner Peyser provider and as the provider of front-line services at each of the CareerForce locations. Basic Career Services are available to all individuals seeking services and includes:

- Eligibility determination;
- Outreach, intake and orientation;
- Initial assessment of skill levels and supportive service needs;
- Labor exchange services including: job search, job placement and provision of in-demand industry and occupation information and nontraditional employment opportunities;
- Referrals to other programs and services;
- Provision of workforce and labor market information;
- Provision of performance and program cost information on eligible training providers;
- Provision of information on how the local area is performing on local performance measures;
- Provision of information on the availability of supportive services or assistance and appropriate referrals;
- Assistance in establishing eligibility for programs of financial aid assistance for training and education programs not provided under WIOA; and
- Provision of information and assistance regarding filing claims under UI programs.

Individualized Career Services

Individualized Career Services are provided by MN DEED –Job Service for individuals receiving staff-assisted job search and work-based training and by MN Valley Action Council for individuals on a classroom-training pathway. Individualized Career Services include:

- Comprehensive and specialized assessment;
- Individualized employment plan;
- Group or individualized counseling;
- Career planning/case management;
- Short-term pre-vocational services;
- Internships and work experiences;
- Workforce preparation activities;
- Financial literacy services;
- Out-of-area job search;
- English language acquisition and integrated education/training programs; and

- Follow-up services.

The focus of career services is to provide individuals with the information they need to make informed career decisions, identify a career goal, assess their interests and aptitudes, and to develop a career plan that identifies the steps, resources and services necessary to achieve their goal for meaningful employment in a demand occupation that pays a family-sustaining wage. One-on-one career counseling services focused on career pathways is critical to providing career and case management/navigator services and support services are especially vital for individuals experiencing barriers to employment and employment disparities. An assessment of career services reveals that we have experienced providers that provide quality career services. However, our capacity to provide this level of intensive, one-on-one services is limited to funding available. It will be important to continue to support development of technology to provide these services for individuals that can self-serve so we can focus limited resources on individuals who require more intensive services. In addition, with our focus on serving populations experiencing employment disparities it will be important to engage other community resources to understand and address the unique needs of special populations.

Training Services: Work-based training services are provided by MN DEED –Job Service to align with their strong connection with area employers. MN Valley Action Council provides classroom-training services aligning with their expertise to provide intensive case management services.

Training services include:

- Occupational skills training;
- On-the-job training;
- Incumbent worker training;
- Cooperative education programs;
- Private sector training;
- Skill upgrading and retraining;
- Entrepreneurial training;
- Transitional jobs (work experience);
- Job readiness training;
- Adult education and literacy; and
- Customized training.

The focus of training services is to provide individuals with the skills they need for a career pathway in high demand industries and occupations that lead to a family-sustaining wage. Training is provided through work-based and/or post-secondary training that results in industry recognized, stackable credentials that leads to meaningful employment.

An assessment of training services reveals that we have developed strong partnerships for the development of career pathways. The health care and manufacturing pathways are well-

developed. We need to continue to expand career pathway opportunities, increase employer engagement for work-based learning opportunities, continue secondary and post-secondary education alignment, increase community engagement for targeted populations, and continue to develop outreach strategies. Although communities of color are served well above their incidence in the population and have comparable employment results, we do see that this target population has lower average wage rates. In order to increase wages, we need to provide comprehensive counseling to promote the benefits of skill training in order to compete for demand occupations that pay livable wages.

- C.5. Describe and assess the type and availability of youth workforce investment activities in the local workforce development area, including youth with disabilities, which description and assessment shall include an identification of successful models of such youth workforce development activities.

The full complement of youth workforce investment activities required under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act are available in the 9-county area of WDA #7. The youth provider of services was selected through a Request for Proposal process. Services will be provided by MN Valley Action Council based on their vast experience and success in providing youth services.

Youth workforce investment activities include:

- Objective assessment;
- Development of service strategies;
- Activities leading to a secondary school diploma;
- Preparation for post-secondary education and training;
- Linkages between academic instruction and occupational education that leads to a credential;
- Preparation for unsubsidized employment;
- Effective connections to employers in demand occupations;
- Program elements include: tutoring, alternative school services, paid and unpaid work experience, occupational skill training, education concurrently with workforce preparation activities, leadership development, supportive services, mentoring, comprehensive career guidance, follow-up services, financial literacy, entrepreneurial skill training, labor market information on demand occupations, and transition to post-secondary education and training.

The focus of youth workforce investment activities is to ensure that youth have the basic skills, work readiness skills and occupational skills necessary to be successful in post-secondary education and training, and ultimately to obtain meaningful employment in demand occupations that pay livable wages along a career pathway.

Successful models include:

- Minnesota Disability Employment Initiative (MN DEI) which was a three-year Department of Labor Grant awarded to Minnesota to provide services to youth with disabilities. South Central was one of three Workforce Development Areas that were chosen to be implementation sites. The key strategic approaches implemented in this project included: Guideposts for Success, Integrated Resource Teams and Partnerships & Collaboration. The Guideposts for Success represent key educational and career interventions that make a positive difference in the lives of youth with disabilities. Integrated Resource Teams were instrumental in coordinating services and resources with multiple agencies and resulted in greater communication and coordination between agencies. The initiative strengthened partnerships with agencies that provide services and resources for youth with disabilities. South Central participated in a joint grant application with MN DEED and other workforce development areas for another Youth DEI grant opportunity to continue building this work.
- Youth at Work project titled “Dream It. Believe It. Achieve It.” targets services to youth from communities of color. In addition to providing youth workforce investment activities, this program engages youth and their families, increases networking and mentoring opportunities and provides cultural awareness and sensitivity training for worksite supervisors. Because we recognize the strong family connection in BIPOC communities, parents are invited to participate in the initial meetings for program enrollment as well as the group activities. BIPOC youth often lack robust social networks so a networking event will be planned to build opportunities to connect with career professional in their field of interest, preferably a BIPOC professional. To increase cultural awareness and sensitivity, worksite supervisors participate in cultural awareness training. “Implicit Bias Training” was presented by the Greater Mankato Diversity Council and “Cultivate a Welcoming Workplace, Culture that Fosters Belonging, Trust and Safety” was offered through the University of Minnesota. The trainings were offered regionally in collaboration with Southwest Minnesota.
- Youth Intervention Program targets services to youth that have been or are currently in out-of-home placement (i.e. foster care, group homes). Youth receive career and life skills curriculum to explore and identify positive education, career and life goals.
- The TANF Youth Project provides work experiences for teen parents receiving Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) benefits or youth in MFIP households. Youth can work an average of 29 hours per week for 12 weeks while meeting their MFIP work participation requirements.
- Outreach to Schools/Partners In Career Exploration program recruits first year graduate students in the Student Counseling Program at Minnesota State University-Mankato to

provide career exploration and career counseling assistance to high school students in local school districts including: Le Sueur-Henderson High School, Madelia High School, Springfield High School, United South Central High School and Waterville-Elysian-Morristown High School.

Skills for Success presentations are provided to local high schools on a variety of topics including: career assessments, career planning & exploration, labor market information, job search, work readiness skills, navigating business culture, post-secondary planning and financial literacy. Skills for Success was offered virtually during the pandemic and features three videos on skills, interviewing and maintaining employment. Each video offered advice from four local employers representing healthcare, manufacturing, construction and agriculture industries. Lesson plans were developed to accompany the videos and offer flexibility for schools and additional resources for teachers to use in the classroom.

Career Pathways for in-demand occupations are introduced through work experience opportunities, career exploration events, and career pathway programming. The work experience component has a significant impact in preparing youth for the workforce and introducing career pathways for in-demand occupations. Worksites are recruited based on youth's interests and career goals. Staff work with youth to investigate careers and labor market information. Each year the South Central WorkForce Council develops a demand occupation list from a rich set of labor market information including current demand and outlook coupled with real-time input from local employers and job counselors. Employers that provide work experiences in high growth and in-demand occupations are targeted. When possible, youth are placed in private sector worksites where there is greater opportunity to get hired after the work experience. We have worked with area high schools to provide academic credit for youth employment activities which assists youth in obtaining the credits they need to graduate on time.

Youth attend the following career exploration events: career expos, Scrubs Camp, Tour of Manufacturing, Construct Tomorrow and the SC Construction Boot Camp.

Finally, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, in collaboration with local educational agencies, are responsible for providing statewide access to Pre-Employment Transition Services for all students with disabilities who are between the ages of 14 through 21. Pre-Employment Transition Services are intended to prepare students for life after high school by planning for postsecondary education or training, employment, and independent living. Services are individualized and can include activities in 5 areas including: Job exploration counseling, Work-based learning experiences, Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in postsecondary education programs, Workplace readiness training, and Instruction in self-advocacy.

- C.6. Describe how training services under chapter 3 of subtitle B of WIOA will be provided in accordance with section 134(c)(3)(G) of WIOA, including, if contracts for training services will be used, how the use of such contracts will be coordinated with the use of individual training accounts under that chapter and how the local area board will ensure informed customer choice in the selection of training programs, regardless of how the training services are to be provided.

The provision of training services begins with a comprehensive assessment. Career counselors assist the customer in aligning their interests, aptitudes and values with occupations in-demand in the region. As the occupational goal is identified, an Occupational Research Packet is completed by the customer to research and provide an understanding of the occupation, its wages, and the demand in the region. Career counselors provide access to information on training providers in the area and their outcomes in order to allow the customer to make an informed choice on the selection of training programs. Staff provide assistance when needed for the completion of the FAFSA to identify financial aid resources that are available. A budget is completed and an Individual Training Account is developed to identify to the customer the amount of resources available for the training and to inform the training provider in order to avoid duplication of resources. We are not utilizing contracts for training services.

- C.7. Describe the plans and strategies for, and assurances concerning, maximizing coordination of service provided by the state employment service under Wagner-Peyser Act, and services provided in the local workforce development area through the one-stop delivery system, to improve service delivery and avoid duplication of services.

One of the advantages of subcontracting with MN DEED to provide WIOA Title I career services is that it provides a natural connection between CareerForce program services such as WIOA Title I, REA, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Veteran Services and Wagner-Peyser services.

Some of these connections are more difficult as REA sessions are currently being provided for UI applicants remotely. MN DEED has provided information on CareerForce services (including Dislocated Worker services) through one-on-one phone calls to UI applicants to ensure UI recipients are aware of the services available through CareerForce locations.

Strategies to coordinate services through the one-stop delivery system, improve service delivery and avoid duplication of services include:

- Wagner Peyser is a required core partner under WIOA and is co-located at all three CareerForce locations in the local workforce development area and participates in the coordination of services, the Memorandum of Understanding and Infrastructure Funding Agreements.
- Wagner Peyser staff coordinates closely with CareerForce co-located partners to provide basic career services to universal customers. When appropriate referrals are

made to eligibility-based programs/services of co-located partners (i.e. WIOA Adult, DW, Vocational Rehabilitation services, Veterans Services, etc.).

- Wagner Peyser staff work closely with REA staff to provide reemployment services at CareerForce locations. After REA staff connect with UI program applicants and discuss services available. Referrals are made to Wagner Peyser staff to reach out to applicants to provide an overview of CareerForce Services, how to register on MinnesotaWorks and referrals to other program services including Dislocated Worker services.
- Wagner Peyser staff assist the REA customer with creating an initial registration and enrolling in the Creative Job Search workshop. Creative Job Search is typically the first job finding/job placement service that is offered to UI applicants. The workshop consists of training on how to find a job that includes career planning, preparing for the job hunt, skills identification, resumes and cover letters, applications and references, social media, interviewing skills, and more. Workshops are provided on-line.
- Wagner Peyser staff will follow up with REA participants who are not enrolled in a program to ensure that they have a complete registration and resume in MinnesotaWorks, and that they are taking advantage of job placement services.
- Wagner Peyser staff are frequently the staff who connect with local employers to list job opportunities on MinnesotaWorks. Wagner Peyser staff keep CareerForce partner staff informed of job opportunities in the area.
- Wagner Peyser staff are typically the point person from CareerForce for job fairs in the area and provide information to all CareerForce staff on events occurring in the local area.
- Wagner Peyser staff participate in CareerForce staff meetings to communicate and coordinate across programs.
- Wagner Peyser managers are members on our workforce boards and part of the One-Stop Operator consortium to participate in the coordination of services at CareerForce locations.

Interagency Coordination

- C.8. Describe how the local workforce development system will work with entities carrying out core programs to align and support services with programs of study authorized under Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act.

The South Central WorkForce Council has a long-standing partnership with the South Central Service Cooperative and secondary/post-secondary Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education partners, programs and initiatives in our local area. WorkForce Council staff serve on the South Central Carl Perkins Consortium. The Consortium establishes a structure and governance to:

- Align regional education and workforce plans (including the Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act).
- Align strategies to cultivate awareness for need for academic and technical skills to ensure college and career success.
- Pilot strategies for career awareness, exploration and advisement for all students.
- Provide professional development that help teachers connect learning to college and careers.
- Further develop regional programs of study and guided pathway programs.

Staff participation on the Consortium provides an opportunity to participate in the development of the Carl Perkins plan. As the workforce partner, we contribute labor market information to help inform on key industries and demand occupations in the region as well as align our workforce goals with Carl Perkins priorities and goals. The goals of the Carl Perkins plan are as follows and align well with our workforce mission and goals:

- Align local/regional CTE work with the completion of a comprehensive local needs assessment (CLNA) at minimum, once every 2 years, requiring funding decisions to be driven by data including aligning programs of study with high-skill, high-wage, and in-demand current and emerging occupations.
- Support the recruitment, preparation, retention, training, and professional development of teachers and faculty, administrators, specialized personnel, and paraprofessionals to meet both traditional and alternative state certification and licensure requirements.
- Implement an equal percent distribution of funds to undergird equity of educational opportunity for both secondary and postsecondary learners at the local consortia level
- Target innovation and improvement by increasing reserve funding as allowed in Perkins V. This includes leveraging the reserve fund for rural and high CTE concentrated consortia to spur innovation, support programs of study, encourage alignment and collaboration and address equity gaps.
- Set separate and distinct state-determined performance levels for secondary and postsecondary partners. This necessitates additional focus areas and workflow at both the state and local level with technical assistance and support for local consortia.
- Support an expansion of data requirements and performance expectations for categories of student groups and special populations as defined by ESSA.
- Allow funding to support CTE exploration with middle school students.

Staff of the South Central Service Cooperative serve on the SC Career Pathways Committee and Youth Council. The local Carl Perkins plan is brought to the Youth Council and Workforce Council for review. In addition, we partner on numerous career fairs and industry days/initiatives in the region to provide youth exposure to key industries and demand occupations. We develop youth directories in partnership with the South Central Service Cooperative, identifying resources

available in the local area. In addition, we coordinate Outreach to School activities with the South Central Service Cooperative.

- C.9. Describe how the local area board will coordinate education and workforce investment activities carried out under this title with relevant secondary and post-secondary education programs and activities to coordinate strategies, enhance services, and avoid duplication of services.

Our primary strategy to coordinate education and workforce investment activities in order to align strategies, enhance services and avoid duplication is through the activities of our Rural Career Counseling Coordinator. Our Regional Workforce Development Area has been awarded funding for a Rural Career Counseling Coordinator position. This position is responsible for strengthening connections between workforce, education, area businesses, job seekers, and other stakeholders; aligning regional resources; implementing sector strategies; and promoting career pathway opportunities within the region. Building on current initiatives (including career pathways, career education, and outreach to schools), one of the key responsibilities will be to enhance alignment and assure non-duplication of services. This was achieved by conducting an asset map and analysis of existing services and identifying where gaps exist. Upon completion of the asset mapping process, the results were shared with the Regional Leadership Board and the local workforce development boards. Based on the results, the boards and staff developed recommendations and strategies for future steps to align resources, fill gaps and implement identified strategies. The Rural Career Counseling Coordinator will work closely with stakeholders throughout the region to ensure overall coordination, as well as share best practices and bring them to scale. Another important strategy is providing career exploration events for key industries, working closely with area partners, including education. These events provide broad exposure for large numbers of students in key industries. Events include:

- Career Expos in Fairmont, Mankato and New Ulm;
- Health Care career exploration events and Scrubs Camp;
- Construct Tomorrow and Construction Boot Camp - career exploration events on trade occupations; and
- Tour of Manufacturing.

Our partnership with local secondary schools and South Central Service Cooperative help us to coordinate and align resources to increase career awareness, career counseling and work-based learning opportunities in the area.

Our outreach to schools program entitled "Partners in Career Exploration" places graduate students in the Student Counseling program at MSU-Mankato at area high schools one day a week with a focus on providing one-on-one career counseling to high school juniors and seniors. The graduate students receive training from CareerForce partners and our labor market analyst who provides information on key industries and demand occupations in the local area.

The South Central Career Pathway Partnership is a key strategy in working with post-secondary to coordinate strategies, enhance services and avoid duplication. Through our Career Pathway Memorandum of Understanding we have delineated the roles and responsibilities of each of the partners. This partnership meets on a quarterly basis and includes partners from Adult Basic Education, South Central College, employers, CareerForce and community partners. Partnership meetings are focused on discussions to align the expertise and resources of partners, coordinate services and implement continuous improvement of services based on customer and partner feedback. Employers inform us of the skill needs for specific occupations and then the partnership works to ensure there is a pathway to training and employment opportunities that includes stackable credentials and allows various entry and exit points along the pathway.

- C.10. Describe how the local area board will coordinate education and workforce investment activities carried out under this title with public transportation and other appropriate supportive services.

The provision of supportive services is critical to the success of individuals we serve. In a rural workforce development area, transportation is by far the greatest need of our customers, in addition to tools, clothing, and emergency medical and financial assistance. Public transportation is limited in our workforce development area and what public transportation that does exist does not meet the needs of individuals who have jobs that require shift work. During our regional planning sessions with stakeholders, transportation was identified as a great need as well as child care. Once again, current child care services does not meet the needs of individuals who have shift work plus there is limited availability for infant care.

During the pandemic, public transportation services were limited due to safety restrictions. As a result, MN Valley Action Council provided transportation for youth participants in a work experience through the use of Head Start vehicles. The South Central WorkForce Council informs and supports local and regional efforts to address transportation needs through organizations such as the Region 9 Development Commission and other local initiatives in small rural communities to transport workers. CareerForce staff and employers have and will continue to participate with these organizations and initiatives to inform on the transportation needs of the workforce.

The workforce system has limited support service dollars and identifies and aligns with other community resources whenever possible to stretch funding as far as possible.

- C.11. Describe how the local area board will coordinate workforce investment activities carried out under this title in the local workforce development area with the provision of adult education and literacy activities under title II, including a description of how the local area board will carry out, consistent with subparagraphs (A) and (B)(i) of section 107(d)(11) and section 232 of WIOA, and the review of local applications submitted under title II of WIOA.

The South Central WorkForce Council has a long, vast history of working in partnership with our local Adult Basic Education partners. We have three Adult Basic Education consortia in our local area including: Area Adult Learning Cooperative, Mankato Area Adult Basic Education and Southwest Adult Basic Education. Adult Basic Education is a key partner in our local workforce development area. Examples of coordination between workforce investment activities and Adult Basic Education include:

- The development of career pathways for agriculture, construction, education, health care, manufacturing and transportation pathways. Through career pathways we align the resources and expertise of local partners to develop sector-based pathways for key industries. Adult Basic Education provides concurrent basic skills instruction and instructional support for adult learners with low basic skills. This is aligned with CareerForce career navigation services, aligning titles under WIOA to provide tuition assistance and support services, as well as South Central College's career and technical education.
- Referrals are made between WIOA programs and Adult Basic Education for adult literacy instruction, GED/high school diploma, and English Language Learner instruction.
- CareerForce partners utilize Adult Basic Education's College Prep course for low-skilled adult learners that are entering programs of study outside of our developed career pathway programs.
- CareerForce partners utilize Adult Basic Education for individuals with limited digital literacy skills to participate in North Star Digital Literacy assessment and classes.
- Referral forms and data-sharing agreement forms have been developed to better serve common customers.
- Adult Basic Education has a representative on the South Central WorkForce Council and staff also participate on the SC Career Pathway Partnership and Youth Council as well as other task forces for special initiatives and events.
- Adult Basic Education is invited to our local workforce development area training days to promote a better understanding of programs and services across partners.

Adult Basic Education is included in our Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) of core partners as well as a MOU for the Career Pathway Partnership. These MOUs delineates the roles and responsibilities of participating partners. Adult Basic Education also participates in our Infrastructure Funding Agreements to identify their contribution to our CareerForce locations.

Every Adult Basic Education consortia in the state provides a program narrative to the MN Department of Education every five years for approval of their service model and programming. The narrative includes provisions for local ABE programs to provide evidence that programming aligns with the local and regional WIOA plan, including evidence of

common referral, co-location, program collaboration, alignment of assessment processes, and helping select and design key occupational pathways. In compliance with WIOA legislation, these applications/narratives are submitted by Adult Basic Education to the local workforce development board for review.

Employer & Economic Development Engagement

C.12. Describe how the local area board will ensure that eligible providers meet the employment needs of local employers, workers and job seekers.

The South Central WorkForce Council, along with our Providers, identify the needs of employers, workers and job seekers through the regional forums, labor market information, engaging local businesses, stakeholders and the broader community.

Employers

Employers indicate that a skilled workforce is the number one factor that predicates business success and competitive advantage. Skills needed that are consistent across industries include:

- Basic work readiness skills (including attendance, timeliness, work ethic, etc.)
- Teamwork and interpersonal skills
- Problem-solving/critical thinking skills
- Basic math and reading skills
- Communication skills (oral and written)
- Computer skills
- Technical/occupational skills

Our local employers report that they are having difficulty finding skilled labor. RWDA #5 has one of the tightest labor markets in the state with an all-time low job seeker per job vacancy rate of .3. In addition, the unemployment rate for South Central was 1.7% in November, which was the lowest rate on record. Comparing Metropolitan Statistical Areas, Mankato has the second lowest unemployment rate in the nation. Increasingly tight labor markets and scarcity of workers is recognized as one of the most significant barriers to future economic growth. The South Central WorkForce Council has several strategies in place to train and prepare a diverse workforce to meet labor shortages.

The second most common theme from employers is the need to develop a talent pipeline of workers. Strategies to develop pipelines focus largely on developing connections with local high schools and post-secondary education providers. The South Central Workforce provides numerous opportunities/events to facilitate these connections including career events and work-based learning opportunities.

Retention of employees is a key issue for employers. They are looking at ways to support their current workforce and provide training/career laddering opportunities. Employers also indicate that they are seeing a greater need for providing resources for employees. Types of resources identified include: child care, mental health services, housing and transportation.

The needs for a skilled workforce in the health care industry has exponentially increased after pandemic. There is great demand for CNAs/PCAs, LPN and RNs. The pandemic causes many workers to retire early creating a shortfall to replace the current demand and fill future openings. Workers will need training to obtain the credentials and certifications required to work in this industry.

Many employers within key industries indicate there needs to be greater awareness of career opportunities within their industry. This is especially prevalent within manufacturing and construction industry occupations. With the decline of the family farm and industrial arts/technology programs at local school districts, youth are not exposed to these career opportunities as they once were. Marketing and career exploration opportunities are needed that expose youth and job seekers to career opportunities within these industries and that combat old stereotypes, especially in the manufacturing industry. The South Central WorkForce Council and providers will support career events and the development of career information. Labor market infographics on key industries in the region have been developed to support providers in providing career information for youth and job seekers. Annual career events have been established to provide exposure to these key industries, including Tour of Manufacturing, Construct Tomorrow and Construction Boot Camp.

As businesses look ahead to the aging of our workforce and the retirements of baby boomers, employers need succession planning strategies and knowledge transfer plans. Employers are looking at mentorship programs where older, long-term employees mentor younger workers. They also indicate that knowledge can transfer both ways, as younger employees have had more exposure to innovation in computer/technology and can assist older workers with technology changes. A related issue for employers is dealing for the first time with four generations in the workforce. Each generation is motivated differently and responds to differing styles of supervision and incentives.

The needs of employers are met by providing qualified job applicants with the basic, work readiness and occupational/technical skills required for employment. This begins by identifying the demand occupations in the region and providing job seekers with the information they need to make informed career choices. Assessments identify any deficits a job seeker may have in meeting the skill requirements of employers. Sector-based career pathways provide job seekers with the basic and technical skills needed to meet employer demand for a skilled workforce through partnerships with Adult Basic Education and post-secondary institutions in the region. Strategies such as employment counseling, work experience/transitional jobs and employability/skill classes address work readiness/employability skill issues. Employer needs are also addressed by MN DEED staff who meet with area employers to identify and address

employment-related issues. Business seminars are held to address broad issues such as succession planning, generational issues, labor laws, and hiring of populations experiencing employment disparities (i.e. BIPOC, individuals with disabilities, ex-offenders and youth). Job fairs and career fairs are organized to provide employers with an opportunity to connect with large number of job seekers and the emerging workforce. Employers are also featured in our CareerForce locations, providing them an opportunity to meet with job seekers utilizing our resource rooms.

Finally, employer needs are identified and addressed by their involvement in workforce development through their participation on boards and committees; by providing tours, job shadowing, and guest speakers in the classroom; and by providing work-based opportunities through work experience, internships/clinicals, and apprenticeships. Employer involvement with workforce and education professionals is instrumental in developing training and strategies that meet their skills needs.

Workers

Trends all indicate that our incumbent workforce will need to be life-long learners. Studies reveal that our workforce will not only change jobs at least eleven times in their life-time, but they will also need to change careers. It is estimated that many of the jobs of tomorrow have not yet been created. As technology, mechanization, and information continually changes, our workforce will continue to need training and upgrading of skills. All of these trends point to a need for access to training opportunities that provide the skills workers will need to compete and succeed in today's and tomorrow's workforce.

Training is also an important retention strategy for employers to keep their current workforce. Workers need training that accommodates their schedules such as on-line, nights and week-ends. They also need company-specific training through incumbent worker training, customized training and on-the-job training opportunities.

Workers need career advancement/career laddering opportunities. They need opportunities to increase their skills so they can move up the career ladder and obtain higher skilled/higher wage jobs. As the aging population leaves the workforce, there will be a need for employees to fill higher level positions. Employers prefer to recruit within for qualified employees that already know the business. As a result, this will provide openings for new entry level workers. Workers need training opportunities that will prepare them for these advancement opportunities.

Training and career laddering opportunities are also important for populations experiencing employment and wage disparities. Frequently, especially through public assistance programs, these populations are placed into low skilled/low wage jobs based on their need for immediate employment and income. These jobs do not always lead to family-sustaining wages. These under-employed workers need access to training and career-laddering opportunities to move up the ladder to higher skilled/higher wage jobs.

Employers indicate that they are seeing more and more that workers need access to resources and services to help them meet their child care, housing, transportation and mental health needs.

Workforce strategies that address worker needs include incumbent worker training, customized training opportunities, evening and on-line training, and worker/employer professional development opportunities.

Job Seekers

There are a variety of individuals looking for work. Whether it is a youth entering the workforce for the first time, a low skilled unemployed individual, a highly skilled dislocated worker or someone currently employed looking for better employment opportunities, they have similar yet specialized needs.

Job seekers need work readiness and basic skills to succeed in the workplace. All occupations, across all industries require basic skills including work readiness skills, basic math and reading, computer, communication, interpersonal, and critical thinking skills. Minnesota State campuses report that an increasing percentage of students are requiring remediation in basic skills prior to enrolling in specific occupational training programs. In order to ensure job seekers have these skills, providers assess basic and work readiness skills at enrollment. Individuals with low basic skills are referred to Adult Basic Education and/or Career Pathway programs to increase basic skills prior to training/employment. Work readiness/employability skills are addressed through employment counseling, work experience and employability/skill classes.

As the labor market continues to change, job seekers need access to good labor market information to make informed career choices. Job seekers are provided labor market information on demand occupations, future employment trends, wages, career pathway and laddering opportunities. Interest and aptitude assessments are provided to help them identify their interests/strengths and how skill sets transfer across job opportunities. Career counselors assist job seekers to connect their interest and strengths to demand occupations in the region.

Job seekers also need basic job search assistance. They need to know how to find the jobs that are available and tap the hidden job market. Employer recruitment methods continue to change. Some employers do not list their job openings. Many require online applications and situational assessments to screen their applicants. Almost all job openings require either an application or resume. Frequently, we work with dislocated workers who have not job searched for many years and require assistance in conducting a successful job search. Special populations, like older workers and ex-offenders need specialized job search assistance to overcome barriers to finding employment. As a result, Creative Job Search and Resume Writing classes are provided at each CareerForce location and on-line. In our career labs, job seekers have access to computers, telephones, copiers to conduct their job search. One-on-one assistance is also available in our career labs for individuals who need additional assistance with researching job opportunities, posting resumes, and completing on-line applications.

Job seekers need support services and wrap-around services that supports them in their employment plan. Job seekers have many needs that can include: food insecurity, housing, child care, mental health services, digital access and transportation. Job seekers need information on how to access the various programs and services in the community that can assist with these needs.

Job seekers need employment opportunities that pay a livable wage. They need jobs that will provide income sufficient to meet their basic needs. DEED's Cost of Living in Minnesota tool indicates that a family of four with two workers needs to earn a minimum of \$18.96 per hour, working 60 hours per week in order to meet basic expenses in our local area. The hourly wage needed to meet basic needs for a single person with one child would be \$21.09. Career counselors provide job seekers information on demand occupations in the region and wages through labor market information in order for them to make informed career choices. As our infographics labor market campaign indicates "majors matter" and job seekers need to "know before they go" into training programs or employment the wage opportunities of their career choices.

Job seekers need the technical skills and credentials required for demand occupations in the region. Consequently, job seekers will need computer and occupational skill training that is affordable, flexible and provides the skills necessary to compete for higher wage job opportunities. Training institutions provide a wide range of training opportunities in a variety of formats. This includes short-term customized training, work-based training, as well as one, two and four year certification/degree programs. The South Central Workforce Council and providers support and encourage job seekers to participate in training to obtain the skills and credentials necessary to compete for higher wage job opportunities.

Labor market information reveals that Minnesota jobs that pay livable wages require education and/or credentials beyond a high school diploma. Job seekers accessing services who lack a post-secondary credential are provided career counseling that stresses the importance of post-secondary training and credentials in preparing them for high skilled job opportunities in demand occupations. Tuition assistance and support services are provided to help job seekers obtain the post-secondary training and credentials required for employment in demand occupations that pay self-sustaining wages.

Finally, employers are seeking job candidates that have experience in the industry. In addition, some job seekers have barriers that make it difficult for them to get their "foot in the door" with local employers. Consequently, when appropriate, work-based learning opportunities are provided including: work experience/transitional jobs, on-the-job training, internships and apprenticeships.

- C.13. Describe how the local area board will facilitate engagement of employers, including small employers, and employers in in-demand industry sectors and occupations, in workforce development programs.

The South Central WorkForce Council facilitates engagement of employers in a number of ways. Most of the employers in our local area are small employers, consequently engagement is primarily with small employers. Due to our focus on key industries and demand occupations, our engagement with employers are in-demand industry sectors and occupations. Engagement of employers in workforce development programs includes:

- One of our regional goals is to: Expand the number of skilled workers through sector-based career pathway approaches in key industries. Through this goal we focus on continued expansion of our engagement with local employers from key industries.
- The South Central WorkForce Council is comprised of a majority of business representatives. Businesses represented on the Council are from the key industries of: business/professional services, construction, health care, and manufacturing. This board is engaged in a public-private partnership in the administration and oversight of workforce development programs. The board identifies the key industries, demand occupations, skill needs, sets policy, and provides direction and oversight of the investment of public dollars in workforce development.
- Employers participate in our regional planning sessions providing input on workforce issues and opportunities and identifying workforce priorities for the region.
- The MN DEED Workforce Strategy Consultant, in partnership with the WorkForce Council, has developed industry-led sector partnerships, focusing on employers from the key industries of health care and manufacturing. Roundtables/workshops are held in the region with employers to promote hiring of diverse populations, individuals with disabilities, ex-offenders and youth.
- Our Workforce Strategy Consultant, Rehabilitation Services Employment Specialists, Wagner Peyser and Local Veterans' Employment Representatives provide outreach to employers and assist with their hiring and retention needs.
- Employers participate in planning and development of career pathways, inform the partnership on skill needs, provide career exploration activities including guest speaker in classroom and industry tours, provide work-based learning opportunities through clinicals and internships/apprenticeships, provide employment and career laddering opportunities.
- Employers are engaged in career exploration and awareness events including health care events, Tour of Manufacturing, Construct Tomorrow, Construction Boot Camp, Scrubs Camp, career expos, employer panels, and job shadowing opportunities.
- Employers provide work-based training for adults and dislocated workers through on-the-job training, internships, apprenticeships and transitional jobs (work experience). In addition, employers provide work experience and internships for youth.

- Employers participate in a number of job fairs held throughout the year that provides employment opportunities for job seekers.
- Providers also engage with employers through local Chambers of Commerce and SMAHRA.

C.14. Describe how the local area board will support a local workforce development system that meets the needs of businesses in the local workforce development area.

102(b)(4)(ii).

The services of our local workforce development system are all centered upon meeting the skill needs of businesses in our local area. Utilizing labor market information, input from employers on our local board, and other employer engagement noted above, we identify the skill needs and skill gaps of local employers. Through our career services we assess the interests/skills of job seekers and identify and address where skill gaps exist. Career counseling focuses on matching the skills and interests of job seekers with the key industries and demand occupations in the region. Job search assistance/curriculum is based on feedback from employers. Training is focused on meeting the skill needs of local employers by targeting training on demand occupations. The WorkForce Council sets a goal for WIOA Title I providers on the percentage of training provided in demand occupations and reviews outcomes on an annual basis.

Our post-secondary providers develop education/training programs based on the skills identified by employers. Career pathways are developed based on the key industries in the local area and the bridge/integrated curriculum is developed based on input of skill needs from employers. The focus of our Workforce Strategy Consultant is to meet the human resource needs of businesses in the local area. Salary Survey and other labor market information is provided to businesses. CareerForce staff facilitate workshops and seminars for business on common topics of interest. This includes access and hiring of populations that are experience employment disparities.

Based on input from area employers we have developed opportunities, activities and events to engage employers and connect them to the available and emerging labor force. This includes career awareness events, jobs fairs, and work-based learning opportunities.

Finally, businesses have indicated the need for incumbent worker training. The Workforce Council supports incumbent worker training through direct resources and/or referrals to other opportunities such as MJSP grants.

C.15. Describe how the local area board will better coordinate programs and services with local and regional economic development providers.

The South Central WorkForce continues to meet with state, regional and local economic development professionals to identify ways to coordinate programs and services. Coordination with economic development providers includes:

- The South Central WorkForce Council is the review board for the Region 9 Comprehensive Economic Development Survey (CEDS) that is completed each year for submission to the federal Economic Development Administration.
- The local MN DEED staff serves on the Economic Development Committee of the Region 9 Development Commission and the Executive Director of the South Central WorkForce Council serves on the Region 9 TaskForce Committee (focused on hiring international students).
- The South Central WorkForce Council has an economic development representative on the board who informs the board on economic development activities in the region.
- The MN DEED local Business Development Specialist convenes local economic development professionals and invites WorkForce Council staff to engage in dialogue with local professionals. As specific projects are identified, economic development professionals work with CareerForce staff on identifying and addressing workforce needs of the business.
- Local, county and regional economic development professionals participated in our regional planning meetings to help identify needs and strategies for the region.
- The South Central WorkForce Council pays for CareerForce membership on local chambers of commerce to aid in coordination of activities between the chambers and workforce development professionals.
- CareerForce staff participate in local economic development meetings and initiatives.

C.16. Describe how the local area board will strengthen linkages between the one-stop delivery system and unemployment insurance programs by offering services to laid-off workers and possible lay-off preventative services for businesses, such as incumbent worker training that up-skills the workers and meets the needs of employers (can include but not be limited to, on-the-job training, apprenticeships, etc.).

A key strategy to strengthening linkages between local workforce services and unemployment insurance is through coordination with Reemployment Assistance (REA). Job Service staff connect with UI applicants that have attended one-on-one REA sessions to ensure attendees are aware of the broad range of services available at CareerForce locations and on dislocated worker services specifically. Attendees that express an interest in dislocated worker services are connected to the appropriate staff for intake.

Local MN DEED staff, with their connection to local employers, is a key link in providing employers information on lay-off prevention strategies and dislocated worker services. Staff provide information to local businesses on potential lay-off prevention strategies such as shared work and training services including incumbent worker training, on-the-job training, transitional

jobs/work experience and apprenticeship. When lay-offs are unavoidable, we reach out to these businesses and their employees to provide information on dislocated worker services available to impacted workers or refer to Rapid Response if the lay-off is significant.

Dislocated worker services provided by our WIOA Title I providers include the full complement of services, including career services, upskilling and training through classroom training and work-based training (including on-the-job training, work experience and apprenticeships). Individuals are supported through career counselors, the provision of supportive services and referrals to other resources in the area.

- C.17. Describe how the local area board will coordinate workforce investment activities with economic development activities, including the promotion of entrepreneurial skills training and microenterprise services.

Our local CareerForce locations provide services for individuals interested in entrepreneurship through our continued partnership with local agencies providing entrepreneurial services including: SBDC, MSU-Mankato, South Central College, Riverbend Center for Entrepreneurial Facilitation/Ignite, Greater Mankato Growth, Waseca's Grow Minnesota Initiative, Southern MN Initiative Foundation, Region 9 Development Commission and local financial institutions. Individuals interested in entrepreneurship are referred to these local partners for services depending on their need and location. Workforce partners provide the full-compliment of program services as appropriate in collaboration with entrepreneurial services including supporting training plans and support services.

CLIMB (Converting Layoffs Into Minnesota Businesses), allows providers to offer entrepreneurial training, business consulting, and technical assistance to dislocated workers who wish to start their own business without impacting performance results. MN DEED Job Service provides guidance and outreach materials for delivery of these services and supports entrepreneurial skills training.

Dislocated Worker Supports

- C.18. How does the local workforce development area ensure staff comply with the policies and procedures for Rapid Response as communicated on DEED's website?

The South Central WorkForce Council supports and complies with the Rapid Response policies developed by the MN Department of Employment & Economic Development. To ensure our providers comply with MN DEED policy, all subcontracts with local service providers state: *SUBGRANTEE agrees to administer the program in accordance with the Act, as amended, State and Federal laws, regulations and guidelines promulgated thereunder, including the MN Department of Employment and Economic Development's WIAO Title I and Related Activities Manual.*

In practice, the local WDA Rapid Response Liaison and service provider staff (MN DEED –Job Service) have years of experience in partnering with MN DEED to respond to dislocation events. The WDA recognizes that the primary responsibility for initial Rapid Response lies with the MN Dept. of Employment & Economic Development. Rapid Response is the primary contact with the business. Good communication between Rapid Response and local partners is key to responding to the needs of area businesses and laid off workers. The earlier Rapid Response can identify and engage the local provider the better success we have making connections with impacted workers.

- a. How does the local workforce development area inform the state Rapid Response team within 24 hours about an actual or potential dislocation event when there is possibility of a mass layoff (50 or more dislocations)?

The South Central WorkForce Council and its provider, MN DEED –Job Service, have built excellent relationships with the State Rapid Response team. Throughout the years, we have had many opportunities to work with Rapid Response partners in responding to local dislocation events. Our local WDA contacts the State Rapid Response Team within 24 hours, either by telephone or email, whenever we are aware of an actual or potential mass lay-off of 50 or more. As a local provider, MN DEED –Job Service works closely with their colleagues in Rapid Response to respond to actual and potential lay-offs.

- b. Describe how the local area board will coordinate workforce investment activities carried out in the local workforce development area with statewide rapid response activities.

The local WDA provides any information they have received to the State Rapid Response Team regarding a mass lay-off. This could be in the form of media announcements or relaying information received from the company itself or from affected workers who come to CareerForce locations for assistance with Unemployment. Rapid Response makes the official contact with the company to confirm the lay-off information, identify if they might qualify for TAA, obtain a layoff list and determine if they will cooperate in setting up outreach/informational meetings with affected workers. If there is no competition for a project (which is usually the case), local staff works closely with Rapid Response to set up the meetings and obtain information (surveys) from the affected workers. On occasion we have had poor turn-outs at the informational meetings, in which case local staff provides outreach to affected workers to obtain survey information. In either case, surveys are sent to State Rapid Response to tabulate and generate a report. Based on survey results, occupations of affected workers, local economy, type of lay-off, etc., a determination is made whether a special project will be sought or referral to formula programs. As history has shown us, every mass lay-off is different with differing circumstances. It is through good communication and working relationships between the local WDA and the State Rapid Response Team that results in

the most effective coordination of processes, procedures and roles to meet the needs of workers affected by their unique lay-off event.

C.19. How does the local workforce development area inform the state Trade Act staff of companies that are potentially TAA certifiable?

Local businesses and/or workers often contact CareerForce locations when they know a potential or actual lay-off may occur. As staff talk with the business or laid off workers, they are trained to inquire as to the reason for the lay-off and whether foreign trade competition may have had an impact. If there is the slightest connection to foreign trade competition, CareerForce staff informs State Trade Act staff either by phone or email of a potential TAA affected lay-off.

a. How does the local workforce development area cooperate with the state Trade Act staff where the layoff involves a company that the DOL trade-certified?

Once the Department of Labor TAA certifies a company, State Trade Act staff sets up a meeting with all the workers affected. It is at this time that the local WDA is contacted and provides assistance in setting up a site for the meeting and provides contact information of affected workers if necessary. The State Trade Act staff sends a mailing to all affected workers that invites them to an informational meeting and includes the Trade Act application. As staff meet with the workers they encourage them to attend the TAA orientation. Individuals are referred to their local CareerForce location to be enrolled in a Dislocated Worker Program (if they are not already enrolled) to establish an Employment Plan with their counselor. The Counselor then assists with the completion of the TAA application and it is submitted to State Trade Act staff for approval. Once the training plan/application is approved by Trade Act staff, the individual, the postsecondary institution and the CareerForce staff are notified. Trade Act staff are responsible for entering Trade Act activities into Workforce One. Local staff continues to provide case management and support services if necessary. The process is much the same for OJTs, with the exception that Trade Act staff work closely with local staff to provide good customer service to employers in the completion of the paperwork. Local and State Trade Act staff continue to communicate as necessary throughout program delivery and program exit.

b. Is the local workforce development area willing to participate in TAA Counselor Training and TAA Participant Training when a trade-certification occurs?

Yes X

C.20. The local workforce development area has developed and implemented local Supportive Service policies that are consistently applied for all participants.

Yes X

Describe the steps taken to ensure consistent compliance with the policy.

The South Central WorkForce Council, in partnership with the Southwest MN Workforce Development Board, has developed a regional support service policy to establish procedures for addressing the provision of support services, including coordination, any limits on the amount, and duration of support services. WIOA Title I service providers are provided a copy of the State and local support service policies. Initial needs for support services are identified during the assessment process and included as part of the employment plan. Other needs may be identified during service delivery and are noted in the case notes/plan. All payments are based on customer needs and must support their employment and training goals. Payments are made through a voucher process with signatory requirement. Payments are paid primarily to vendors and are only provided directly to participants on a limited basis when vendor payment is not practical. Any payment outside the perimeters of the support service policy would require management approval and signature. Fiscal staff are required to flag any vouchers that do not meet policy requirements. All support services are documented on the Workforce One participant record and payments documented through our fiscal system.

Services to Military Service Members and Spouses

C.21. Are all WIOA-funded partners complying with the guidance provided in [TEGL 10-09](#) regarding Priority of Service for Veterans and Eligible Spouses?

Yes X

C.22. How do you identify current or former Military Service Members coming into your CareerForce Center?

The Minnesota Veterans Questionnaire is used to identify Veterans. We ask all customers that come to the CareerForce locations if they ever served in the U.S. Military. If the answer is yes, we ask them to complete the Veterans Questionnaire. Non-JVSG (Jobs for Veterans State Grants) staff do the initial assessment/review of the questionnaire, and make appropriate referrals based on the responses on the questionnaire. On-site signage helps the customers to self-identify themselves as U.S. Military members.

Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) Specialists Core Competency Development Training provides an overview of how to screen veterans, utilize the questionnaire, and review the process to make appropriate referrals. Local staff will participate in this training opportunity.

- C.23. How do you inform current or former Military Service Members coming into your CareerForce Center about “Veteran Priority of Service?”

Signage at the CareerForce locations advises Veterans and other eligible persons of Veterans Priority of Service (POS). Information on Priority of Service is also provided during various program orientations, from staff, and during workshops. LVER staff train and update local staff and management on the provisions of POS and PL107-288.

- C.24. If your CareerForce Center has a presence on the Internet (outside of your local DEED CareerForce Center site) how do you promote Public Law 107-288, “Veterans Priority of Service” to veterans on that website?

In addition to local CareerForce locations, Veterans Priority of Service is indicated and promoted on the Minnesota DEED main website at <http://mn.gov/deed/job-seekers/veteran-services/>. Minnesota State’s Career Wise (www.careerwise.minnstate.edu) with input and assistance from JVSG staff continues to be a partner in promoting and enhancing career opportunities for Veterans by offering dedicated links to Veterans and other link sources for translating military skills to civilian skills. Minnesota’s civil service career website (<http://mn.gov/mmb/careers>) in collaboration with JVSG staff continues to develop links and other efforts to reach and assist Veterans.

- C.25. How do you identify current or former Military Service Members with “significant barriers to employment?”

The Minnesota Veterans Questionnaire, a DOL approved standard process, is used to identify Veterans with a significant barrier to employment (SBE). The questionnaire identifies DOL designated SBE’s per VPL 03-14, including change 2.

- C.26. When a current or former Military Service Member with a significant barrier to employment is identified, how do you refer them to an appropriate intensive service provider when there is no Disabled Veteran Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist in your CareerForce Centers?

This local area has identified partner staff (in each CareerForce location) to provide services (including intensive services) to SBE Veterans in the absence of a DVOP. These staff have had training on serving Veterans via the NVTI Webinar “Helping Veterans to Meaningful Careers”, and from LVER staff one on one, and during staff and partner meetings. CareerForce staff conducts an initial assessment with current or former Military Service Member with a significant

barrier to employment and then refers them to the designated intensive service provider when the DVOP is not available.

- C.27. How are DVOP and/or Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVER) staff integrated into the overall service delivery strategy in your CareerForce Centers?

Local DVOP and/or LVER staff attends staff and partner meetings and orientations, participate on CareerForce work teams, collaborate with CareerForce partners on various events and LVER staff provide training to partner staff and management regarding the JVSG program.

- C.28. What is your strategy to ensure that job-ready job seekers enrolled in your programs (including non-program universal customers) are registering in MinnesotaWorks.net and are making their resumes viewable to employers?

CareerForce staff serving universal customers utilizing our resource rooms encourages job seekers to register on MinnesotaWorks and stresses the importance of posting their resume so it is viewable to employers. All core partners working with individuals enrolled in programs emphasize the importance of a viewable resume from the initial meeting. After the job seeker is enrolled, the job counselor can check MinnesotaWorks resume status by using the MAD system. If an enrolled job seeker is not in Minnesota Works (viewable) the job counselor contacts the individual to discuss and offer their assistance in developing and posting a quality resume in the system. All customers attending Creative Job Search and Resume Workshops are encouraged to post their resume on MinnesotaWorks. All UI claimants attending REA one-on-one sessions are required to register on MinnesotaWorks and to post their resume. Staff from all of the CareerForce core partners have received instruction on MinnesotaWorks and customer assistance is provided for any job seekers (universal or program) needing assistance developing their resume or posting it on MinnesotaWorks. Another strategy to ensure job seekers are registering and making their resumes viewable to employers is to increase the number of job orders on MinnesotaWorks. MN DEED Job Service staff promote employers listing their job openings on Minnesota Works and will assist with posting jobs when necessary.

- C.29. Are all WIOA-funded partners complying with the guidance provided in [TEGL 11-11, Change 1](#) and [TEGL 11-11, Change 2](#) regarding Selective Service?

Yes X

SECTION D: ASSURANCES AND CERTIFICATIONS

Training and Employment Guidance and State Law Compliance

Conflict of Interest and Integrity: Local area boards must make decisions in keeping with several laws and regulations. Indicate below that your local area board is aware and that the local workforce development area's conflict of interest policies are in compliance with DOL

Training and Employment Guidance Letter [\(TEGL\) 35-10](#) and [Minnesota OGM 08-01](#) and its relevant federal laws and regulations, including being aware of the:

- A) referenced statute on Government Records
- B) requirement to retain documentation for six years.

Yes X

Handling and Protection of Personally Identifiable Information: The local workforce development area is complying with the guidance provided in [TEGL 39-11](#).

Yes X

Human Trafficking: The local workforce development area is aware of [TEGL 09-12](#) and will follow the procedures for working with trafficked persons.

Yes X

Gender Identification: The local workforce development area is aware of [TEGL 37-14](#) (and associated Attachments [1](#) and [2](#)) and will follow the procedures for developing a similar policy including key terminology and have in place regarding working with customers who may be lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. Local workforce development areas will also participate in any related training.

Yes X

Uniform Guidance: The local workforce development area is aware of [TEGL 15-14](#) regarding Uniform Guidance.

Yes X

Assurances

By signing and submitting this plan, the local area board is assuring on behalf of itself and the subgrantee, where applicable:

As a condition to the award of financial assistance from the Department of Labor under Title I of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and any other DEED/Workforce Development Employment and Training funds, the grant applicant assures that it will comply fully with the nondiscrimination and equal opportunity provisions and other assurances of the following laws:

- **Accessibility** - [Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended](#) - Requires that federally funded program providers make their electronic information and technology accessible to people with disabilities;
- **ACORN** – [Funds may not be provided](#) to the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, or any of its affiliates, subsidiaries, allied organizations or successors;
- **Audits** – [2 CFR 200.501](#) and [Single Audit Act Amendments of 1996](#) - organization-wide or program-specific audits shall be performed;
- **Buy American**- Buy American Act – award may not be expended unless the funds comply with [USC 41, Section 8301-8303](#);
- **Data Sharing** – [MN Access to Government Data](#), [MN Duties of Responsible Authority](#); [MN Access to Information](#); [MN Administrative Rules Data Practices](#); [DEED Policy – Data Practices](#);
- **Disability** - that there will be compliance with the [Architectural Barriers Act of 1968](#), [Sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#), as amended, and the [Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990](#);
- **Drug-Free Workplace** – [Drug-Free Workplace Act of 1988](#) – requires all organizations to maintain a drug-free workplace;
- **Equipment** – [2 CFR 200. 313](#), [200.439](#) – must receive prior approval for the purchase of any equipment with a per unit acquisition cost of \$5,000 or more, and a useful life of more than one year;
- **Fire Safety** – [15 USC 2225a](#) – ensure that all space for conferences, meetings, conventions or training seminars funded in whole or in part complies with the protection and control guidelines of the Hotel and Motel Fire Safety Act ([Public Law 101-391](#));
- **Fraud/Abuse** - that the provider has policies on fraud and abuse and will contact DEED for potential fraud and abuse issues; [20 CFR 667.630](#); [DEED Policy – Fraud Prevention and Abuse](#);

- **Health Benefits** – [Public Law 113-235, Division G, Sections 506 and 507](#) – ensure use of funds for health benefits coverage complies with the [Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015](#);
- **Insurance** - that insurance coverage be provided for injuries suffered by participants in work-related activities where Minnesota's workers' compensation law is not applicable as required under Regulations [20 CFR 667.274](#);
- **Insurance** – [Flood Disaster Protection Act of 1973](#) – provides that no Federal financial assistance to acquire, modernize or construct property may be provided in identified flood-prone communities in the United States, unless the community participates in the National Flood Insurance Program and flood insurance is purchased within 1 year of the identification;
- **Limited English** - [Executive Order 13166](#) - Improving access to services for persons with limited English proficiency;
- **Nondiscrimination** - [Section 188 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act](#) (WIOA) - Requires applying nondiscrimination provisions in the administration of programs and activities for all eligible individuals, including individuals with disabilities;
- **Nondiscrimination** - [Section 188 of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998](#) (WIA) - Requires applying nondiscrimination provisions in the administration of programs and activities for all eligible individuals, including individuals with disabilities;
- **Nondiscrimination** - [Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended](#) – Prohibits discrimination on the bases of race, color, and national origin under any program receiving federal financial assistance;
- **Nondiscrimination** - [Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended](#) - Prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin in employment;
- **Nondiscrimination** - [Title II of the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008](#) - Prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of genetic information;
- **Nondiscrimination** - [Title V of the Older Americans Act of 1965](#) - Prohibits discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national original, age disability or political affiliation or beliefs in any program funded in part with Senior Community Services Employment Program funds;
- **Nondiscrimination** - [Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, as amended](#) - Requires applying nondiscrimination provisions, based on sex, in educational programs;

- **Nondiscrimination** - [Title I \(Employment\) Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#) - Prohibits state and local governments, from discriminating against qualified individuals with disabilities in job application procedures, hiring, firing, advancement, compensation, job training, and other terms, conditions, and privileges of employment;
- **Nondiscrimination** - [Title II \(State and Local Governments\) Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#) - Prohibits qualified individuals with disabilities from discrimination in services, programs, and activities;
- **Nondiscrimination** - [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended](#) - Prohibits discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities;
- **Nondiscrimination** - [Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended](#) - Prohibits discrimination on the basis of age;
- **Nondiscrimination** - [Title 29 CFR Part 31](#) Nondiscrimination in federally-assisted programs of the Department of Labor, effectuation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964;
- **Nondiscrimination** - [Title 29 CFR Part 32](#) Nondiscrimination on the basis of disability in programs and activities receiving or benefiting from federal assistance;
- **Nondiscrimination** - [Title 29 CFR Part 33](#) Enforcement of nondiscrimination on the basis of disability in programs or activities conducted by the Department of Labor;
- **Nondiscrimination** - [Title 29 CFR Part 35](#) Nondiscrimination on the basis of age in programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance from the Department of Labor;
- **Nondiscrimination** - [Title 29 CFR Part 37](#) Implementation of the Nondiscrimination and Equal Opportunity provisions of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998;
- **Nondiscrimination** - [Title 29 CFR Part 38](#) Implementation of the Nondiscrimination and Equal Opportunity provisions of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act;
- **Nondiscrimination** - [Executive Order 13160](#) Nondiscrimination on the basis of race, sex, color, national origin, disability, religion, age, sexual orientation, and status as a parent in federally conducted education and training Programs;
- **Nondiscrimination** - [Executive Order 13279](#) - Nondiscrimination against grant seeking organizations on the basis of religion in the administration or distribution of federal financial assistance under social service programs, including grants, contracts, and loans;
- **Nondiscrimination** - [The Minnesota Human Rights Act of 1973, Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 363A](#) - Prohibits discrimination in employment and providing public services on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, natural origin, sex, marital status

(employment only), disability, status with regard to public assistance, sexual orientation, familial status (employment only), citizenship, or age (employment only), and local human rights commission activity (employment only);

- **Nondiscrimination** - that collection and maintenance of data necessary to show compliance with the nondiscrimination provisions of WIA and [WIOA Section 188](#), as provided in the regulations implementing that section, will be completed;
- **Opportunity** – [Executive Order 12928](#) – encouraged to provide subcontracting/subgranting opportunities to Historically Black Colleges and Universities and other Minority Institutions and to Small Businesses Owned and Controlled by Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Individuals;
- **Personally Identifiable Information (PII)** – [Training and Guidance Letter 39-11](#) – must recognize and safeguard PII except where disclosure is allowed by prior written approval of the Grant Officer or by court order;
- **Procurement** – Uniform Administrative Requirements – [2 CFR 200-317-36](#) – all procurement transactions to be conducted in a manner to provide, to the maximum extent practical, open and free competition;
- **Publicity** – no funds shall be used for publicity or propaganda purposes, preparation or distribution or use of any kit, pamphlet, booklet, publication, radio, television or film presentation designed to support or defeat legislation pending before the Congress or any state/local legislature or legislative body, except in presentation to the Congress or any state/local legislature itself, or designed to support or defeat any proposed or pending regulation, administrative action, or order issued by the executive branch of any state or local government. Nor shall grant funds be used to pay the salary or expenses of any recipient or agent acting for such recipient, related to any activity designed to influence the enactment of legislation, appropriations regulation, administrative action, or Executive Order proposed or pending before the Congress, or any state government, state legislature or local legislature body other than for normal and recognized executive-legislative relationships or participation by an agency or officer of a state, local or tribal government in policymaking and administrative processes within the executive branch of that government;
- **Salary/Bonus** – [Public Law 113-235, Division G, Title I, Section 105](#) – none of the funds appropriated under the heading “Employment and Training” shall be used by a recipient or sub-recipient of such funds to pay the salary and bonuses of an individual, either as direct costs or indirect costs, at a rate in excess of [Executive Level II](#). Further clarification can be found in [TEGL 5-06](#);
- **Seat Belts** - [Executive Order 13043](#) – Increasing Seat Belt Use in the United States;

- **Text Messaging** – [Executive Order 13513](#) – encouraged to adopt and enforce policies that ban text messaging while driving company-owned or –rented vehicles or GOV or while driving POV when on official Government business or when performing any work for or on behalf of the Government;
- **Trafficking of Persons** – [2 CFR 180](#) – OMB Guidelines to Agencies on Government wide Debarment and Suspension – may not engage in severe forms of trafficking, procure a commercial sex act or use forced labor in the performance;
- **Veteran Priority of Service** - [Public Law 107-288: Jobs for Veterans Act](#) - Priority of service for veterans (including veterans, eligible spouses, widows and widowers of service members) in qualified job training programs;
- **Veterans** - [Public Law 112-56: Vow to Hire Heroes Act of 2011](#) - Establishes guidelines for service providers who are providing employment, training, academic or rehabilitation services for military veterans;
- **Veterans** - that veterans will be afforded employment and training activities authorized in WIA and WIOA Section 134, and the activities authorized in Chapters 41 and 42 of Title 38 US code, and in compliance with the veterans' priority established in the Jobs for Veterans Act. ([38 USC 4215](#)), U.S. Department of Labor, [Training and Employment Guidance Letter 5-03](#) and Minnesota's Executive Order 06-02;
- **Voter Registration** - that the required voter registration procedures described in [Minnesota Statutes 201.162](#) are enacted without the use of federal funds;
- **Voter Registration** – [52 USC 20501 – 20511](#) – National Voter Registration Act of 1993.

Certifications

By signing and submitting this plan, the local area board is certifying on behalf of itself and the subgrantee, where applicable:

- A. That this **Regional and Local Workforce Development Area Plan** was prepared and is in accordance with all applicable titles of the WIOA Act of 2014, Title V of the Older Americans Act, applicable Minnesota state statutes and that it is consistent with Minnesota's current and future state plans;
- B. that it has provided at least a thirty day period for public comment and input into the development of plan by members of the local area board and the public (including persons with disabilities) and has provided information regarding the plan and the planning process, including the plan and supporting documentation, in alternative formats when requested and that any comments representing

- disagreement with the plan are included with the local plan forwarded to DEED (as the Governor's representative) Section 118(c); Section 108 (d)
- C. that the public (including individuals with disabilities) have access to all of the local area boards and its components' meetings and information regarding the local area board's and its components' activities;
 - D. that fiscal control and fund accounting procedures necessary to ensure the proper disbursement of, and accounting for, funds paid through the allotments funded through the contract/master agreement issued by DEED have been established;
 - E. that it is, and will maintain a certifiable local area board;
 - F. that it will comply with the confidentiality requirements of WIA Section 136 (f)(3) and WIOA Section 116 (i)(3)
 - G. that the respective contract/master agreement and all assurances will be followed;
 - H. that it will ensure that no funds covered under the contract/master agreement are used to assist, promote, or deter union organizing;
 - I. that this plan was developed in consultation with the local area board;
 - J. that it acknowledges the specific performance standards for each of its programs and will strive to meet them;
 - K. that the local area board members will not act in a manner that would create a conflict of interest as identified in 20 CFR 667.200(a)(4), including voting on any matter regarding the provision of service by that member or the entity that s/he represents and any matter that would provide a financial benefit to that member or to his or her immediate family;
 - L. that local area board and staff are aware of local WorkForce Center services, and are working with and referring to the WorkForce Center services as appropriate;
 - M. that all staff are provided the opportunity to participate in appropriate staff training;
 - N. that, if applicable, the local area board must maintain the currency of its information in the System Award Management until submission of the final financial report or receive the final payment, whichever is later;
 - O. that sponsored (in whole or in part) conferences are charged to the grantee as appropriate and allowable; and

- P. that funds are not used for the purpose of defraying costs of a conference unless it is directly and programmatically related to the purpose of the award.
- Q. that the local area board and its sub-grantees must also adhere to the same certifications and assurances that DEED must assure.

WIOA Guidance

This list of guidance is non-exhaustive and applies only to ETA programs. ETA has published a number of documents to guide the operationalization of WIOA, with the most recent and popular listed below. Find the full library of guidance [here](#).

- [Training and Employment Guidance Letter \(TEGL\) 04-23](#)
 - *Conveys to states the Administration's priorities, State Plan requirements, submission process, and deadline for WIOA Unified and Combined State Plans (State Plans) for PY 2024 through 2027, consistent with WIOA Sections 102 and 103.*
- [Training and Employment Guidance Letter \(TEGL\) 05-23](#)
 - *Provides information to the public workforce system and other entities that receive federal financial assistance under Title I of WIOA, as well as education and training programs or activities receiving DOL financial assistance, regarding the prohibition on discrimination based on actual or perceived religion, shared ancestry, or ethnic characteristics.*
- [Training and Employment Guidance Letter \(TEGL\) 09-22](#)
 - *Guidance and planning information to states, local workforce areas, and other recipients of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I youth formula funds on the activities associated with the implementation of WIOA.*
- [Training and Employment Guidance Letter \(TEGL\) 07-22](#)
 - *Increasing Employer and Workforce System Customer Access to Good Jobs.*
- [Training and Employment Notice \(TEN\) 16-22](#)
 - *The Employment and Training Administration is Implementing Grant Solutions for Grant Award Processing and the Payment Management System for Financial Reporting.*
- [Training and Employment Guidance Letter \(TEGL\) 22-20](#)
 - *Program Year (PY) 2021 Funding Allotments and Instructions for the Indian and Native American (INA) Programs.*
- [Training and Employment Guidance Letter \(TEGL\) 23-20](#)
 - *Program Year (PY) 2021 Planning Guidance for National Farmworker Jobs Program Career Services and Training Grantees and Housing Grantees.*

- [Training and Employment Guidance Letter \(TEGL\) 07-20](#)
 - *Effective Implementation of Priority of Service Provisions for Most in Need Individuals in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Adult Program.*
- [Training and Employment Guidance Letter \(TEGL\) 08-19](#)
 - *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I Training Provider Eligibility and State List of Eligible Training Providers (ETPs) and Programs.*
- [Training and Employment Guidance Letter \(TEGL\) 19-16](#)
 - *Guidance on Services provided through the Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service (ES), as amended by title III of WIOA, and for Implementation of the WIOA Final Rules.*
- [Training and Employment Guidance Letter \(TEGL\) 21-16](#)
 - *Third Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I Youth Formula Program Guidance.*

SIGNATURE PAGE

Local Workforce Development
Area Name

Workforce Development Area #7 – South Central

Local Area Board Name

South Central WorkForce Council

Name and Contact Information for the Local Area Board Chair:

Name Valerie Bentsdahl

Title Human Resource Manager

Organization Jones Metal, Inc.

Address 1 3201 Third Avenue

Address 2

City, State, ZIP Code Mankato, MN 56001

Phone 507-205-9694

E-mail vbentsdahl@jonesmetalinc.com

Name and Contact Information for the Local Elected Official(s):

Name John Roper

Title County Commissioner

Organization Faribault County Board of Commissioners

Address 1 18 Elm Boulevard

Address 2 _____
City, State, ZIP Code Blue Earth, MN 56013
Phone 507-526-2710
E-mail john.roper@co.faribault.mn.us

We, the undersigned, attest that this submittal is the Local Plan for our Workforce Development Board and Local Workforce Development Area and hereby certify that this Local Plan has been prepared as required and is in accordance with all applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations.

Local Area Board Chair

Local Elected Official

Name Valerie Bentsdahl

Name John Roper

Title Local Area Board Chair

Title Joint Powers Board Chair

Signature 

Signature 

Date March 13, 2024

Date March 18, 2024

Attachment A

REGIONAL OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Regional Workforce

Development Area

Regional Workforce Development Area #5

Local Workforce Development

Area

Local Workforce Development Area #7 – South Central

MEMBER (Name, Title)	ORGANIZATION	LWDA	COMMITTEE ROLE
Valerie Bentsdahl, Human Resources Manager	Jones Metal, Inc.	South Central	Board Chair
Brent Christopherson, Talent Acquisition Manager	Taylor Corporation	South Central	Board Vice Chair
John Roper County Commissioner	Faribault County Board of Commissioners	South Central	Joint Powers Board Chair
Jaime Bless County Commissioner	Martin County Board of Commissioners	South Central	Joint Powers Board Vice Chair
Carla Goedtke Chief Financial Officer	Investors Choice Financial Services, Inc.	Southwest MN	Board Chair
Andy Easley Human Resources Director	Ralco/The tru Shrimp Company	Southwest MN	Board Vice Chair
DeRon Brehmer County Commissioner	Lac qui Parle County Board of Commissioners	Southwest MN	Board Chair
David Lieser County Commissioner	Chippewa County Board of Commissioners	Southwest MN	Board Vice Chair

Attachment B

LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AREA CONTACTS

ROLE	Contact Name	Phone	Email	Reports to (name only)
Rapid Response Liaison for Mass Layoffs	Heather Gleason	507-345-2418	hgleason@workforcecouncil.org	Valerie Bendtahl, Chair
Equal Opportunity Officer	Heather Gleason	507-345-2418	hgleason@workforcecouncil.org	Valerie Bendtahl, Chair
Program Complaint Officer	Heather Gleason	507-345-2418	hgleason@workforcecouncil.org	Valerie Bendtahl, Chair
Records Management/Records Retention Coordinator	Adam Chelstrom	507-345-2413	achelstrom@mnvac.org	Amanda Mackie, MVAC
ADA Coordinator	Christine Olson	507-389-6954	Christine.olson@state.mn.us	Lisa Hatz, MN DEED
Data Practices Coordinator	Adam Chelstrom	507-345-2413	achelstrom@mnvac.org	Amanda Mackie, MVAC
Language Access Coordinator	Heather Gleason	507-345-2418	hgleason@workforcecouncil.org	Valerie Bendtahl, Chair

CareerForce Center in Fairmont

ROLE	Contact Name	Phone	Email	Reports to (name only)
Site Representative	Mary Shumski	507-618-5611	mary.shumski@state.mn.us	Arthur Larsen, MN DEED
Job Service Manager	Mary Shumski	507-618-5611	mary.shumski@state.mn.us	Arthur Larsen, MN DEED
Vocational Rehabilitation Services Manager	Karla Tauer	507-479-0568	karla.tauer@state.mn.us	Lisa Hatz, MN DEED
State Services for the Blind Manager	Sheila Koenig	651-539-2361	sheila.koenig@state.mn.us	Jon Benson, MN DEED
Local Workforce Development Area Director	Heather Gleason	507-345-2418	hgleason@workforcecouncil.org	Valerie Bendtahl, Chair
Adult Basic Education (ABE)	Sue Vogelsang	507-526-3172	svogelsang@beas.blueearth.k12.mn.us	ISD 518 ISD 2860
Carl Perkins Post-Secondary Manager	Glenn Morris	507-389-5106	gmmorris@mncsc.org	Les Martisko, SC Service Cooperative
Adult	Mary Shumski	507-618-5611	mary.shumski@state.mn.us	Arthur Larsen, MN DEED
Dislocated Worker	Mary Shumski	507-618-5611	mary.shumski@state.mn.us	Arthur Larsen, MN DEED
Youth	Margy Hendrickson	507-345-2405	margy@mnvac.org	Amanda Mackie, MVAC

CareerForce Center in Mankato

ROLE	Contact Name	Phone	Email	Reports to (name only)
Site Representative	LeRoy Kiecker	507-344-2622	leroy.kiecker@state.mn.us	Arthur Larsen, MN DEED
Job Service Manager	LeRoy Kiecker	507-344-2622	leroy.kiecker@state.mn.us	Arthur Larsen, MN DEED
Vocational Rehabilitation Services Manager	Christine Olson	507-389-6954	Christine.olson@state.mn.us	Lisa Hatz, MN DEED
State Services for the Blind Manager	Sheila Koenig	651-539-2361	sheila.koenig@state.mn.us	Jon Benson, MN DEED
Local Workforce Development Area Director	Heather Gleason	507-345-2418	hgleason@workforcecouncil.org	Valerie Bendtahl, Chair
Adult Basic Education (ABE)	Nate Warden Karen Wolters	507-665-4626 507-207-3054	nwarden@isd2397.org kwolte1@isd77.org	Marlene Johnson Audra Boyer
Carl Perkins Post-Secondary Manager	Glenn Morris	507-389-5106	gmmorris@mncsc.org	Les Martisko, SC Service Cooperative
Adult	LeRoy Kiecker	507-344-2622	leroy.kiecker@state.mn.us	Arthur Larsen, MN DEED
Dislocated Worker	LeRoy Kiecker	507-344-2622	leroy.kiecker@state.mn.us	Arthur Larsen, MN DEED
Youth	Margy Hendrickson	507-345-2405	margy@mnvac.org	Amanda Mackie, MVAC

CareerForce Center in New Ulm

ROLE	Contact Name	Phone	Email	Reports to (name only)
Site Representative	Sarah Swantz	507-354-3138	sswantz@mnvac.org	Margy Hendrickson, MVAC
Job Service Manager	LeRoy Kiecker	507-344-2622	leroy.kiecker@state.mn.us	Arthur Larsen, MN DEED
Vocational Rehabilitation Services Manager	Christine Olson	507-389-6954	Christine.olson@state.mn.us	Lisa Hatz, MN DEED
State Services for the Blind Manager	Sheila Koenig	651-539-2361	sheila.koenig@state.mn.us	Jon Benson, MN DEED
Local Workforce Development Area Director	Heather Gleason	507-345-2418	hgleason@workforcecouncil.org	Valerie Bendtahl, Chair
Adult Basic Education (ABE)	Karen Wolters	507-207-3054	kwolte1@isd77.org	Audra Boyer
Carl Perkins Post-Secondary Manager	Glenn Morris	507-389-5106	gmmorris@mnsccsc.org	Les Martisko, SC Service Cooperative
Adult	LeRoy Kiecker	507-344-2622	leroy.kiecker@state.mn.us	Arthur Larsen, MN DEED
Dislocated Worker	LeRoy Kiecker	507-344-2622	leroy.kiecker@state.mn.us	Arthur Larsen, MN DEED
Youth	Margy Hendrickson	507-345-2405	margy@mnvac.org	Amanda Mackie, MVAC

Attachment C

LOCAL AREA BOARD MEMBERSHIP ROSTER

Please Click on the link below to access Attachment C:



Attachment C_
Local Board Member

LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD MEMBERSHIP

WIOA Sec. 107(b)(2)(A)

Business Representatives – Majority of the board must come from this category.

Representatives of businesses in the local area who:

- i. Are owners of businesses, chief executives or operating officers of businesses, or other business executives or employers with optimum policymaking or hiring authority
- or-
- ii. represent businesses, including small businesses, or organizations representing businesses, that provide employment opportunities that, at a minimum, include high-quality, work-relevant training and development in in-demand industry sectors or occupations in the local area

(Must be nominated by local business organizations and business trade associations)

<u>Business or Agency Name</u>	<u>Member Names</u>	<u>Nominated By</u>	<u>Term Expiration Date</u> If Vacant, Date to be Filled
Lakeview Health Services	Deb Barnes	Winnebago Chamber of Commerce	June 2024
Jones Metal, Inc.	Val Bentsdahl	Greater Mankato Growth/Chamber	June 2026
Associated Finishing, Inc.	Karla Balbuena	Greater Mankato Growth/Chamber	June 2025
Taylor Corporation	Brent Christopherson	Greater Mankato Growth/Chamber	June 2024
Ecumen	Rachel Evers	Greater Mankato Growth/Chamber	June 2025
Coloplast	Lauren Oliver	Greater Mankato Growth/Chamber	June 2026
Dotson Iron Casting	Nicole Raelyn	Greater Mankato Growth/Chamber	June 2024
Crysal Valley	Ashley Leivermann	Greater Mankato Growth/Chamber	June 2024
Spherion	Ann Miller	Greater Mankato Growth/Chamber	June 2024
Winegar, Inc.	Tim Wenzel	City of Waseca	June 2025
Mayo Clinic Health System	Rena Wolf	Greater Mankato Growth/Chamber	June 2025

LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD MEMBERSHIP

WIOA Sec. 107(b)(2)(B)			
Representatives of the workforce within the local area – At least 20% of the total board membership must represent the categories in this section.			
<u>Membership Category</u> Name of labor organization, CBO, etc.	<u>Member’s Name</u>	<u>Nominated By</u>	<u>Term Expiration Date</u> If Vacant, Date to be Filled
(i) Representatives of labor organizations (for a local area in which employees are represented by labor organizations), or (for a local area in which no employees are represented by such organizations) other representatives of employees; Minimum of two representatives (Must be nominated by local labor federations or other employee representative group.)			
Local 583 Laborers (Labor-Apprenticeships)	Stacey Karels	Mankato Building Trades	June 2025
North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters (Labor-Apprenticeships)	Jon Nowak	North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters	June 2025
(ii) Representative of labor organization or a training director, from a joint labor-management apprenticeship program, or if no such joint program exists in the area, such a representative of an apprenticeship program in the area Minimum of one representative, if such a program exists in the area			
Local 583 Laborers (Labor-Apprenticeships)	Stacey Karels	Not Applicable	June 2025
North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters (Labor-Apprenticeships)	Jon Nowak		June 2025
(iii) Representatives of community-based organizations that have demonstrated experience and expertise in addressing the employment needs of individuals with barriers to employment, including organizations that serve veterans or that provide or support competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities (Optional category)			
Individuals with Disabilities		Not Applicable	
Veterans			
(iv) Representatives of organizations that have demonstrated experience and expertise in addressing the employment, training, or education needs of eligible youth, including representatives of organizations that serve out-of-school youth (Optional category)			
MET, Inc (CBO – Youth Employment)	Andrea Montemeyer	Not Applicable	June 2026
MN Valley Action Council (CBO – Youth Employment)	Amanda Mackie		June 2024

LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD MEMBERSHIP

WIOA Sec. 107(b)(2)(C)

Each local board shall include representatives of entities administering education and training activities in the local area.

When there is more than one local area provider of adult education and literacy activities under Title II, or multiple institutions of higher education providing workforce investment activities the CLEO must solicit nominations from those providers and institutions, respectively, in appointing the required representatives.

<u>Membership Category</u> List Business or Agency Name	<u>Names</u> Member's Name	<u>Nominated By</u> Organization Name	<u>Term Expiration Date</u> If Vacant, Date to be Filled
A representative of eligible providers administering adult education and literacy activities under title II of WIOA			
Minimum of one representative			
Area Adult Learning Cooperative	Nate Warden	ABE Coordinators	June 2026
A representative of institutions of higher education providing workforce investment activities (including community colleges)			
Minimum of one representative			
South Central College	Jim Hanson	Dr. Parker, South Central College	June 2024
Representatives of local educational agencies, and of community-based organizations with demonstrated experience and expertise in addressing the education or training needs of individuals with barriers to employment (Optional category)			

LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD MEMBERSHIP

WIOA Sec. 107(b)(2)(D)			
Each local board shall include representatives of governmental and economic and community development entities serving the local area.			
<u>Membership Category</u> List Business or Agency Name	<u>Names</u> Member's Name	<u>Nominated By</u> Organization Name	<u>Term Expiration Date</u> If Vacant, Date to be Filled
Representatives of economic and community development entities (Minimum of one representative)		Not applicable	
Region 9 Economic Development Commission	Alejandra Bejarano	Region 9	June 2025
Representative from the State employment service office under the Wagner-Peyser Act serving the local area (Required)		Not applicable	
MN Department of Employment and Economic Development – Job Service	Mary Shumski	MN DEED – Job Service	June 2026
Representative of the programs carried out under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 serving the local area [other than section 112 or part C of that title] (Required)		Not applicable	
MN Department of Employment and Economic Development - Vocational Rehabilitation Services	Christine Olson	MN DEED - VRS	June 2026
Representatives of agencies or entities administering programs serving the local area relating to transportation, housing, and public assistance (Optional)		Not applicable	
Blue Earth County Human Services/ MN Prairie County Alliance (Waseca Co.)	DeAnn Boney	Human Service Directors	June 2026
Representatives of philanthropic organizations serving the local area (Optional)		Not applicable	
<i>Other</i>		Not applicable	

I certify that I have accurately reported the above information included in this document. I understand that misreporting this information could result in decertification of the local workforce development board for my area.

Heather Gleason

(Signature)

3/13/2024
_ (Date)

Attachment D

LOCAL AREA BOARD SUBCOMMITTEE LIST

Regional Workforce Development Area	Regional Workforce Development Area #5
Local Workforce Development Area	Local Workforce Development Area #7 –South Central

Committee Name	Objective/Purpose
Executive Committee	This committee provides leadership for the Council and is comprised of the Council Chair, Vice Chair and other members as deemed appropriate by the Council. The Executive Committee has responsibility for personnel and budget issues; and when necessary acts on behalf of the Council.
Operations Committee	This committee consists of the core partners of the CareerForce locations. This committee is responsible for on-going program review, local marketing and day-to-day operations of the CareerForce locations.
Youth Council	The Youth Council is made up of area youth partners (including education, CareerForce, employers/unions and community partners) and is responsible for developing and implementing strategies to prepare our emerging workforce, assist youth in transitioning and coordinate youth resources.
SC Career Pathway Partnership	The SC Career Pathway Partnership is made up of representatives from employers, Adult Basic Education, South Central College, CareerForce partners, human service and community partners. This partnership is responsible for aligning resources and expertise to develop career pathways with multiple entry and exit points that lead to stackable credentials for demand industries in the region; addressing the workforce skill shortage in the local area.
RFP Task Force Committees	The RFP Task Force committees develop and implement a Request for Proposal process to select service providers for WIOA Youth and

	<p>WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker and State Dislocated Worker Programs. The task force consists of representatives from the WorkForce Council, Workforce Council staff and Youth Council. The task forces are responsible for implementing the RFP process and for providing recommendations to the Joint Powers Board and SC WorkForce Council. In addition, we convene an RFP Task for the selection of the One-Stop Operator for local workforce development area.</p>

Attachment E

LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AREA SUB-GRANTEE LIST

**Regional Workforce
Development Area**

Regional Workforce Development Area #5

**Local Workforce
Development Area**

Local Workforce Development Area #7 –South Central

Name of Sub-Grantee	Services Provided	Funding Source	Sub-Grantee located in which CFC?	If not in CFC, provide Address, City, State, ZIP Code
MN DEED – Job Service	Basic/Individualized Career Services, Work-Based Training and Career Pathway Navigator	WIOA Adult, WIOA Dislocated Worker & State Dislocated Worker, Pathways to Prosperity, Support Service Grant	Fairmont Mankato	

Attachment F

**LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AREA NON-CFC PROGRAM SERVICE
DELIVERY LOCATION LIST**

**Regional Workforce
Development Area**

Regional Workforce Development Area #5

**Local Workforce
Development Area**

Local Workforce Development Area #7 –South Central

Name and Location (City)	Program Service Delivered
MN Valley Action Council – Blue Earth	WIOA Adult, WIOA DW, State DW, WIOA Youth, MYP, SCSEP
MN Valley Action Council – Gaylord	WIOA Adult, WIOA DW, State DW, WIOA Youth, MYP, MFIP/DWP/SNAP
MN Valley Action Council – LeCenter	WIOA Adult, WIOA DW, State DW, WIOA Youth, MYP, SCSEP, MFIP/DWP/SNAP
MN Valley Action Council – Mankato	WIOA Youth, MYP
MN Valley Action Council – St. James	WIOA Adult, WIOA DW, State DW, WIOA Youth, MYP, SCSEP
MN Valley Action Council – St. Peter	WIOA Adult, WIOA Youth
MN Valley Action Council - Waseca	WIOA Adult, WIOA DW, State DW, WIOA Youth, MYP, SCSEP MFIP/DWP/SNAP

Attachment G

LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AREA KEY INDUSTRIES IN REGIONAL ECONOMY

Based on your most recent analysis of regional economies, provide a list of the key industries in your regional economy.

Upon review of labor market information and input from employers and stakeholders, RWDA #5 will focus on key industry sectors:

- **Agriculture**
- **Construction**
- **Education**
- **Health Care and Social Assistance**
- **Manufacturing**
- **Transportation and Warehousing**



SOUTHWEST MINNESOTA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REGIONS 6W, 8, and 9

Covers counties:

Big Stone, Blue Earth, Brown, Chippewa,
Cottonwood, Faribault, Jackson,
Lac qui Parle, Le Sueur, Lincoln, Lyon,
Martin, Murray, Nicollet, Nobles,
Pipestone, Redwood, Rock, Sibley, Swift,
Waseca, Watonwan, and Yellow Medicine

2023 REGIONAL PROFILE

Updated September 2023

Amanda O’Connell
Southeast & South Central

Rochester MN
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DEMOGRAPHICS

POPULATION CHANGE

The Southwest Minnesota planning region includes a total of 23 counties, covering three Economic Development Regions (EDRs) and two Workforce Development Boards (WDBs). In sum, Southwest Minnesota was home to 397,156 people in 2022, about 7% of the state’s total population. The region saw a 0.4% increase in population over the past 12 years, with losses in Region 6W and Region 8 slightly outpaced by the larger increase in Region 9. In comparison, the state of Minnesota saw a 7.8% gain (Table 1).

According to 2022 Census population estimates, only 4 of the 23 counties in the region gained population from 2010 to 2022, with the other 19 seeing declines. The largest counties in the region are Blue Earth and Nicollet County, which make up the Mankato/North Mankato Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). With 69,631 people, Blue Earth is the 13th largest and 16th fastest growing county out of 87 in the state, and Nicollet has 34,441 people after gaining over 1,700 people. Other large counties in the region include Le Sueur with 29,153 people, Lyon with 25,262 people, Brown with 25,723 people, and Nobles with 21,947 people; while Big Stone and Lincoln are the smallest counties in the region and among the smallest in the state.

Table 1. Population Change 2010-2022

	2010 Census	2022 Census	2010-2022 Change	
			Number	Percent
Southwest Minnesota	395,643	397,156	+1,513	+0.4%
Region 6W	45,190	43,358	-1,832	-4.1%
Big Stone Co.	5,269	5,144	-125	-2.4%
Chippewa Co.	12,441	12,284	-157	-1.3%
Lac qui Parle Co.	7,259	6,689	-570	-7.9%
Swift Co.	9,783	9,755	-28	-0.3%
Yellow Medicine Co.	10,438	9,486	-952	-9.1%
Region 8	119,151	116,351	-2,800	-2.3%
Cottonwood Co.	11,687	11,356	-331	-2.8%
Jackson Co.	10,266	9,893	-373	-3.6%
Lincoln Co.	5,896	5,580	-316	-5.4%
Lyon Co.	25,857	25,262	-595	-2.3%
Murray Co.	8,725	8,060	-665	-7.6%
Nobles Co.	21,378	21,947	+569	+2.7%
Pipestone Co.	9,596	9,355	-241	-2.5%
Redwood Co.	16,059	15,361	-698	-4.3%
Rock Co.	9,687	9,537	-150	-1.5%
Region 9	231,302	237,447	+6,145	+2.7%
Blue Earth Co.	64,013	69,631	+5,618	8.8%
Brown Co.	25,893	25,723	-170	-0.7%
Faribault Co.	14,553	13,926	-627	-4.3%
Le Sueur Co.	27,703	29,153	+1,450	+5.2%
Martin Co.	20,840	19,650	-1,190	-5.7%
Nicollet Co.	32,727	34,441	+1,714	+5.2%
Sibley Co.	15,226	14,955	-271	-1.8%
Waseca Co.	19,136	18,893	-243	-1.3%
Watonwan Co.	11,211	11,075	-136	-1.2%
State of Minnesota	5,303,925	5,717,184	+413,259	+7.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

COMPONENTS OF POPULATION CHANGE

Southwest Minnesota has experienced a natural increase – more births than deaths – of 243 over the last two years. Additionally, the region lost population because of out-migration, with about 1,600 more people moving out of the region than moving in. Though there was domestic out-migration of 2,760 people, the region did enjoy positive in-migration of over 1,151 additional residents from international sources (Table 2).

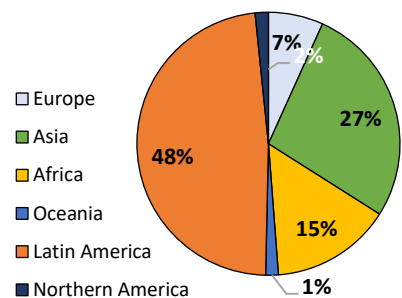
Table 2. Components of Population Change, 2020-2022

Area	Total Change	Natural Increase	Vital Events		Net Migration		
			Births	Deaths	Total	Inter-national	Domestic
Southwest	-1,295	+243	10,060	9,817	-1,610	+1,151	-2,761
Minnesota	+10,680	+26,917	144,350	117,433	-17,365	+20,012	-37,377

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program

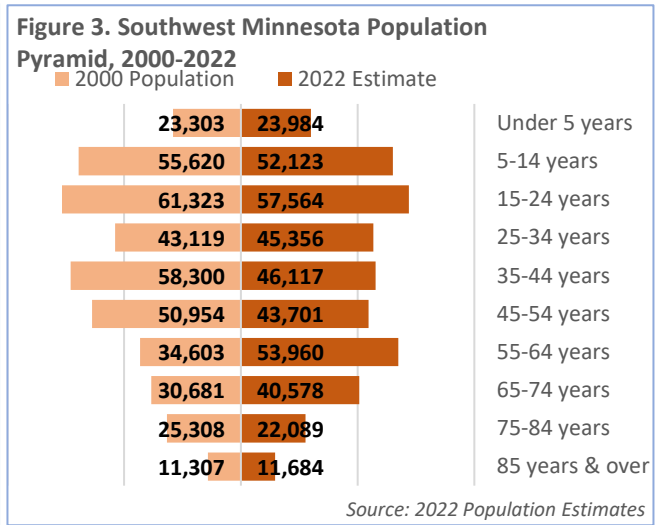
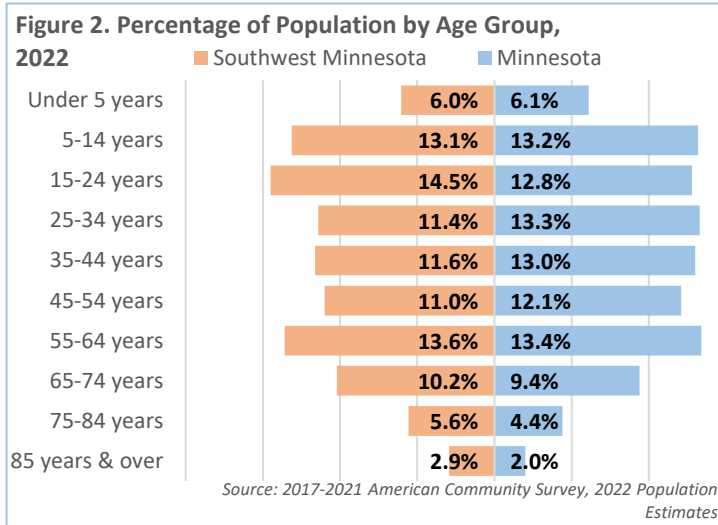
Southwest Minnesota is now home to 20,363 foreign born residents, or about 5.1% of the total population. The number of immigrants in the region increased by 41% since 2010, outpacing the statewide growth rate of 30.6%. About half of these immigrants (9,781 people) were from Latin America, while the second largest number were from Asia, and then Africa (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Place of Birth for the Foreign Born Population, 2021



POPULATION BY AGE GROUP

Southwest Minnesota has an older population than the rest of the state, with 32.3% of residents aged 55 years and over, compared to 29.2% statewide. Consequently, Southwest Minnesota had a lower percentage of people in the 25- to 54-year-old age group, typically considered the “prime working years.” However, having several postsecondary institutions in the region led to a higher percentage of people aged 15 to 24 (Figure 2).

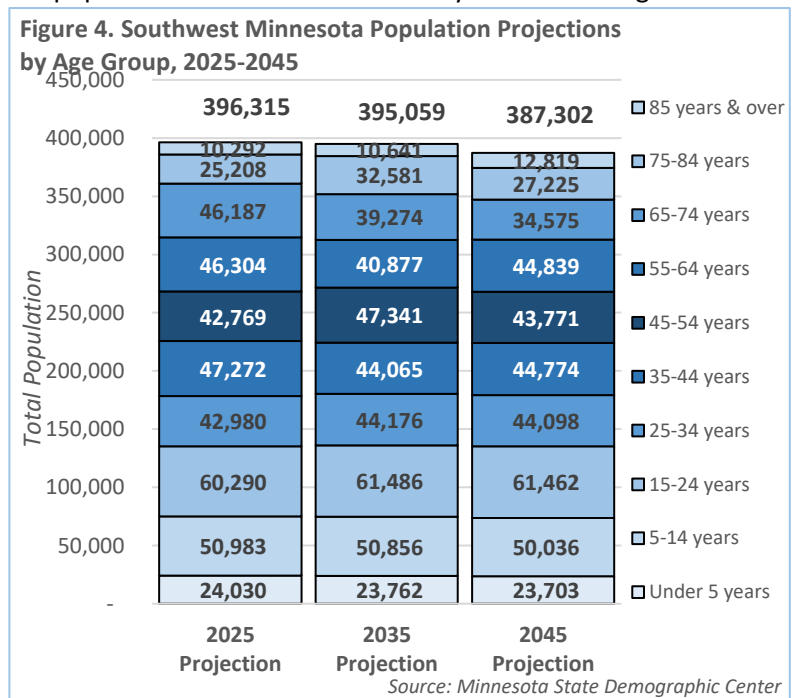


A large portion of the region’s population is a part of the Baby Boom generation, people born between 1946 and 1964, which is creating a significant shift in the population over time. While the number of younger and middle-aged residents was declining, the number of residents aged 55 years and over was rapidly increasing. This included a huge jump in the number of people from 55 to 74 years of age, but a more measured change in people aged 75 years and over (Figure 3).

POPULATION PROJECTIONS BY AGE GROUP

Southwest Minnesota is projected to experience population decline in the next 20 years. According to population projections from the [State Demographic Center](#), the region is expected to lose 9,013 residents from 2025 to 2045, a -2.3% decline (Figure 4). In comparison, the state of Minnesota is projected to grow 7.4%.

Southwest Minnesota is expected to add over 4,500 people aged 75 years and over, a 12.8% jump. Gains are also projected for 15-34 year olds and 45-54 year olds. The region is projected to see declines in every other age group. The largest losses are expected in the 65-74 year old age group as the Baby Boom generation moves through the population pyramid. Less intense declines are projected for 55-64 year olds, down just -3.2%. Losses in the youngest age groups are also more moderate, ranging from -1.4% to -1.9%.



POPULATION BY RACE

Southwest Minnesota’s population is less diverse than the state’s but is becoming more diverse over time. In 2021, 89.7% of the region’s residents reported white as their race, compared to 80.7% of residents statewide. The region had much smaller percentages of Black or African American residents, Asian or Other Pacific Islanders, people of Two or More Races, and American Indian & Alaskan Natives. However, at 7.4%, Southwest Minnesota had a higher share of people reporting Hispanic or Latino origin than the state, and a slightly higher percentage of people of some other race. The region’s white population was declining, whereas the population of all other race groups was increasing rapidly (Table 3).

Nobles County had the most diverse populace in the region, including 29.2% of residents reporting Hispanic origin, which was the highest rate in the state. Watonwan, Lyon, Cottonwood, and Blue Earth were also relatively diverse. In contrast, at least 94% of residents in Murray, Rock, Big Stone, Lac qui Parle, Brown, and Lincoln were white alone, making them among the least diverse in the state.

Table 3. Race and Hispanic Origin, 2021	Southwest Minnesota			Minnesota	
	Number	Percent	Change from 2011-2021	Percent	Change from 2011-2021
Total	397,922	100.0%	+0.8%	100.0%	+7.4%
White	356,872	89.7%	-3.8%	80.7%	+0.4%
Black or African American	7,878	2.0%	+55.2%	6.6%	+42.2%
American Indian & Alaska Native	2,479	0.6%	+6.1%	0.9%	-8.0%
Asian & Other Pac. Islander	7,327	1.8%	+32.4%	5.0%	+35.8%
Some Other Race	9,837	2.5%	+78.9%	2.1%	+66.5%
Two or More Races	13,529	3.4%	+155.5%	4.6%	+121.8%
Hispanic or Latino	29,344	7.4%	+44.9%	5.6%	+31.6%

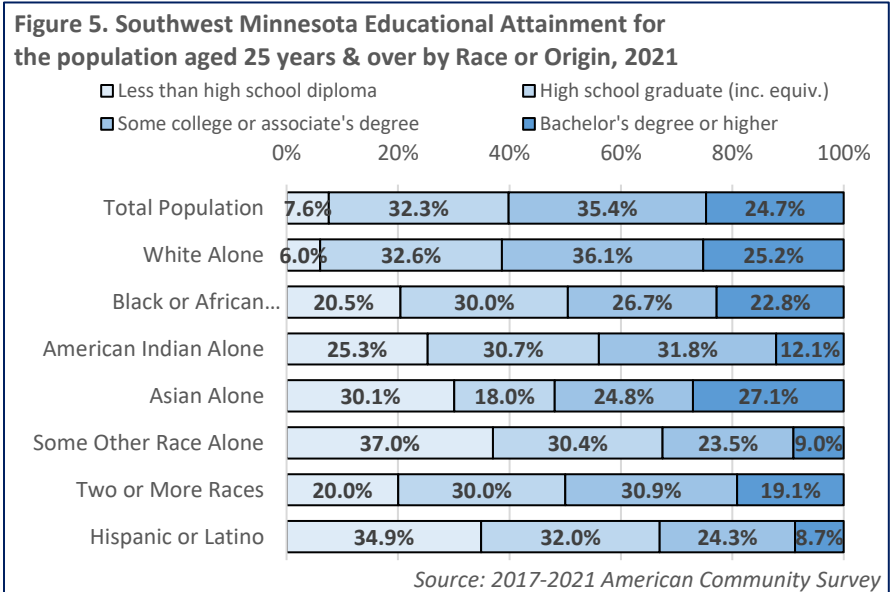
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2017-2021 American Community Survey

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

With 35.3% of adults aged 18 years and over having a college degree, Southwest Minnesota has lower educational attainment than the state, where 46% of adults have an associate, bachelor’s, or advanced degree. In contrast, Southwest has a slightly higher percentage of people with some college but no degree, and a higher percentage of people with a high school diploma or less (Table 4). Educational attainment varies significantly by race in Southwest Minnesota. About 35% of Hispanic or Latino residents and 37% of people of Some Other Race had less than a high school diploma, compared to just 6% of White residents. However, over 30% of Blacks, American Indians, and people of Two or More Races have attended some college or earned an associate degree, and over 22% of White, Asian, and Black or African American residents had a bachelor’s degree or higher. More than 27.1% of Asian residents held a bachelor’s or higher (Figure 5).

Table 4. Educational Attainment for the Adult Population, 2021	Southwest Minnesota		Minnesota
	Number	Percent	Percent
Total Population, 18 years & over	305,903	100.0%	100.0%
Less than high school	24,394	8.0%	7.1%
High school graduate (incl. equiv.)	97,446	31.9%	24.5%
Some college, no degree	76,232	24.9%	22.4%
Associate's degree	38,178	12.5%	11.1%
Bachelor's degree	50,523	16.5%	23.3%
Advanced degree	19,130	6.3%	11.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2017-2021 American Community Survey



LABOR FORCE

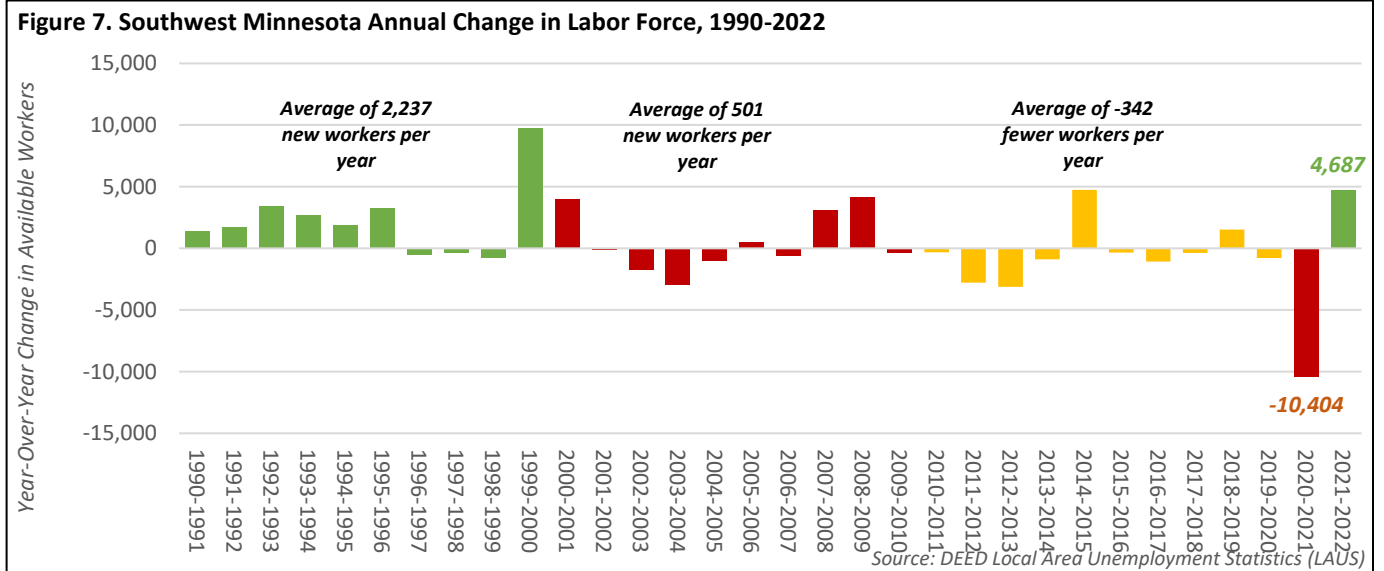
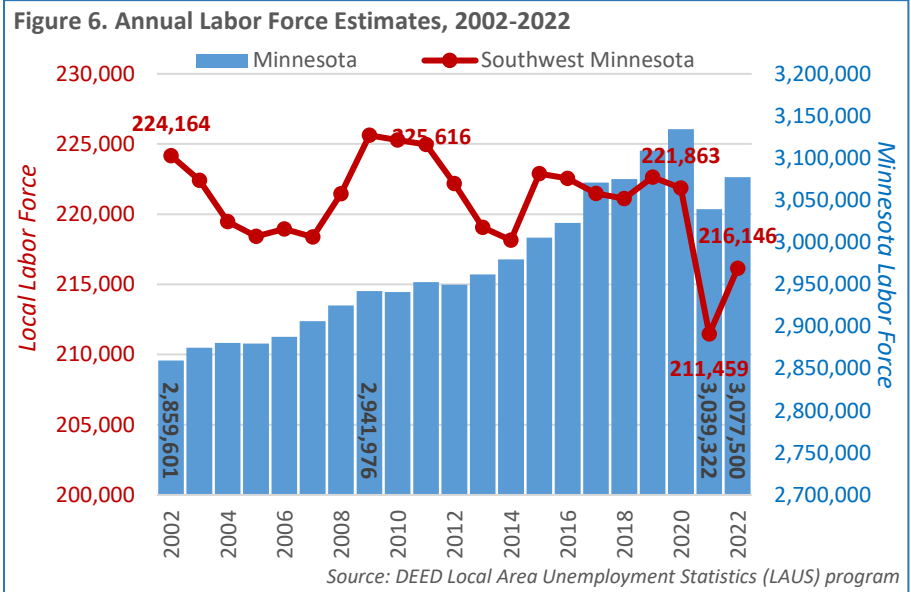
LABOR FORCE CHANGE

According to data from DEED’s [Local Area Unemployment Statistics](#) program, Southwest Minnesota had an annual average labor force count of just under 216,150 workers in 2022. The regional labor force has fluctuated up and down since 2002, but ended with the fewest people working or looking for work in more than 20 years in 2021 (Figure 6).

After growing to nearly 223,000 workers in 2019, Southwest lost about 11,180 workers from 2019 to 2021 due to the pandemic recession. This was the most severe labor force

decline of the 6 planning regions in the state, and Southwest has not seen a full bounceback so far through the first half of 2023. There were just over 5,686 unemployed workers in 2022, the fewest since 1999 and just over half the 2020 average. These labor force constraints will have a substantial impact on the regional economy.

Averaging a net gain of 2,237 additional labor force participants per year between 1990 and 2000, employers in Southwest Minnesota were able to tap into a large and growing pool of talented workers. With recent declines, the region actually averaged a loss of 342 fewer workers per year between 2010 to 2020, before the precipitous declines of 2021 (Figure 7). Increasingly tight labor markets and a growing scarcity of workers is now recognized as one of the most significant barriers to future economic growth in Southwest Minnesota. In the face of these constraints, it has become evident that a more diverse workforce in terms of age, gender, race, ethnicity, disability status, and immigration has been and will continue to be a vital source of the workers that employers need to succeed. As the white, native-born workforce continues to age, younger workers of different races or from different countries will comprise the fastest growing segment of the labor force.



LABOR FORCE PROJECTIONS

If Southwest Minnesota’s population changes at the projected rates shown in Figure 4 above, the region would be expected to see a decline in the labor force over the next decade. Applying current labor force participation rates to future population projections by age group creates labor force projections for the region, which show a steady 1% drop in workforce numbers (Table 5).

In addition to the overall decline, the labor force will also see a significant shift over time, with relatively large gains in the number of workers aged 75 years and over against huge declines in the number of workers aged 55 to 64 years. The region is also expected to lose teenaged workers and workers aged 25-44 in the next decade. However, the region is expected to see gains in the number of 45 to 54 year olds as well as in 20 to 24 year olds. Due to the projected changes, the 25 to 54 year old age group will make up about 57.8% of the total workforce in 2035, up from 55.9% in 2021. Either way, these long-term declines will likely lead to a tight labor market in the future, with employers needing to respond to the changing labor force availability in the region.

	2025 Labor Force Projection	2035 Labor Force Projection	2025-2035 Change	
			Numeric	Percent
16 to 19 years	13,506	12,977	-529	-3.9%
20 to 24 years	25,096	27,102	+2,006	+8.0%
25 to 44 years	79,672	77,897	-1,775	-2.2%
45 to 54 years	36,994	40,949	+3,955	+10.7%
55 to 64 years	34,882	30,794	-4,088	-11.7%
65 to 74 years	14,590	12,406	-2,184	-15.0%
75 years & over	2,752	3,351	+599	+21.8%
Total Labor Force	207,493	205,476	-2,017	-1.0%

Source: calculated from MN State Demographic Center projections, and 2017-2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS

With 67.1% of the working age population aged 16 years and over in the labor force, Southwest Minnesota had slightly lower labor force participation rates than the state’s 69.2% rate. However, the region actually had higher labor force participation rates than the state in both the younger and older age groups, but the overall rate was lower because of the region’s smaller labor force in the prime working years (Table 6).

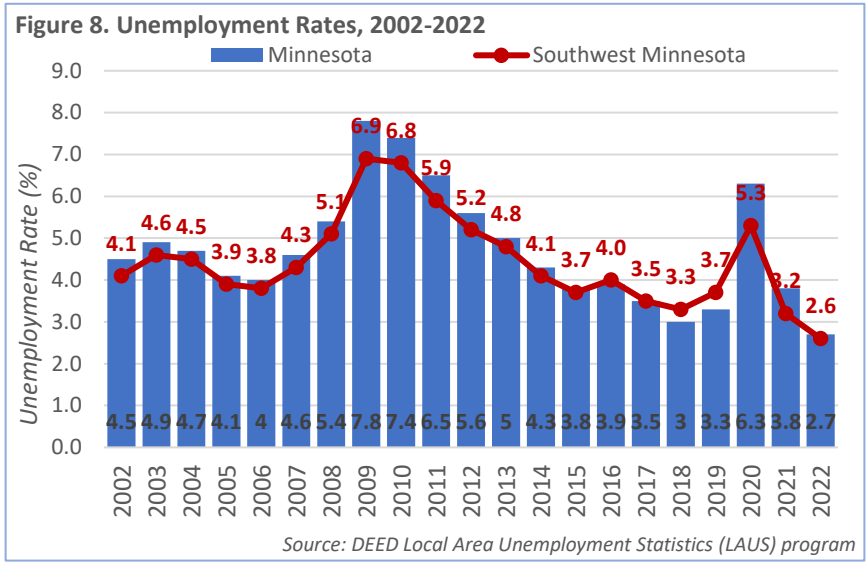
In contrast, the region had lower participation rates than the state for most racial groups; and also had large unemployment rate disparities for BIPOC workers. The region also had 10,594 workers with disabilities in the labor force, participating at rates similar to the state, but lower than the rate for all workers. Unemployment rates were highest for youth, BIPOC workers, people with less education, and workers with disabilities.

Age Group	Southwest Minnesota			Minnesota	
	Labor Force	Labor Force Partic. Rate	Unemp. Rate	Labor Force Partic. Rate	Unemp. Rate
Total Labor Force	212,517	67.1%	3.4%	69.2%	4.0%
16 to 19 years	12,783	55.5%	9.1%	52.3%	10.7%
20 to 24 years	24,763	84.0%	4.9%	83.3%	6.7%
25 to 44 years	80,905	88.3%	2.9%	88.8%	3.6%
45 to 54 years	37,873	86.5%	2.2%	87.6%	3.0%
55 to 64 years	40,728	75.3%	3.1%	73.1%	3.2%
65 to 74 years	12,843	31.6%	2.4%	28.0%	3.2%
75 years & over	2,624	7.8%	2.1%	6.6%	2.9%
Employment Characteristics by Gender					
Male	112,811	71.2%	4.0%	72.7%	4.4%
Female	99,703	63.1%	2.7%	65.6%	3.6%
Employment Characteristics by Race & Hispanic Origin					
White alone	193,387	66.9%	3.0%	68.5%	3.4%
Black or African American	3,677	66.4%	7.6%	71.9%	8.6%
American Indian & Alaska Native	1,068	59.0%	3.7%	57.4%	12.9%
Asian or Other Pacific Islanders	3,866	66.1%	6.3%	72.7%	4.1%
Some Other Race	4,960	73.0%	5.2%	75.8%	6.2%
Two or More Races	5,563	76.1%	8.8%	74.1%	7.3%
Hispanic or Latino	14,102	75.5%	8.4%	77.0%	6.6%
Employment Characteristics by Disability					
With Any Disability	10,594	51.6%	9.6%	53.6%	9.9%
Employment Characteristics by Educational Attainment					
Population 25 to 64 years	159,513	84.2%	2.8%	84.4%	3.4%
Less than H.S. Diploma	8,909	67.9%	3.2%	66.6%	4.6%
H.S. Diploma or Equivalent	41,501	78.9%	1.6%	77.3%	2.5%
Some College or Assoc. Degree	63,010	86.8%	2.8%	85.1%	3.6%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	46,073	90.0%	1.6%	90.3%	2.1%

Source: 2017-2021 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

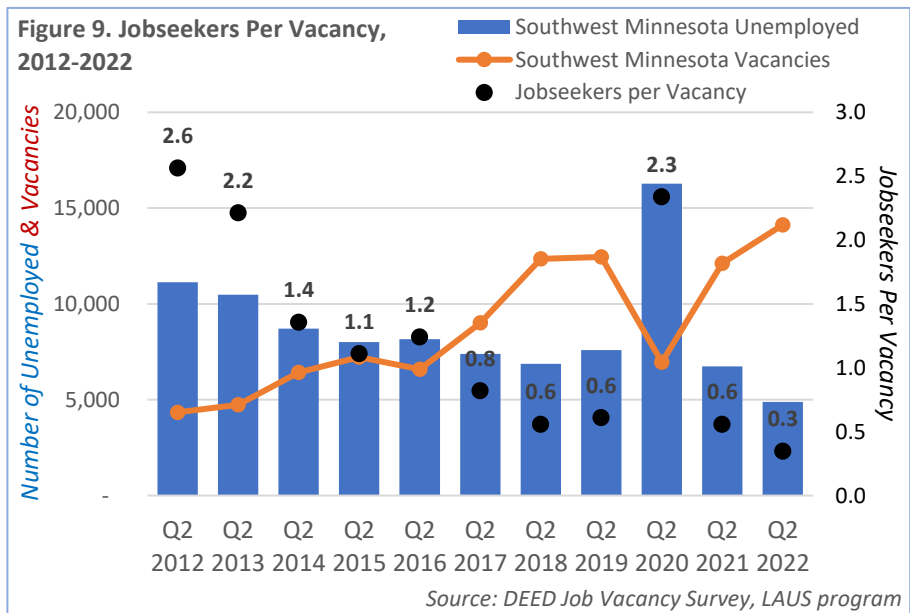
Unemployment rates jumped across the state and in Southwest Minnesota in 2020 due to the pandemic recession, with the highest rates reported in the summer before dropping back down by the end of the year. The 2.6% rate of 2022 is lower to those seen pre-pandemic. According to [Local Area Unemployment Statistics](#), even though rates rose, they did not get as high as during the Great Recession. In general, Southwest Minnesota’s unemployment rate has closely tracked the state rate, staying at 4.0% or lower over the past 5 years (Figure 8).



JOBSEEKERS PER VACANCY

As the number of available workers has declined and the economy continues to recover, the region’s labor market has tightened. Prior to the pandemic, the region had seen three straight years with less than one jobseeker per vacancy, indicating an extremely tight labor market.

The ratio spiked to 2.3 jobseekers per vacancy at the beginning of 2020, then declined to an all-time low of 0.3 in the beginning of 2022. By that measure, Southwest Minnesota had one of the tightest labor markets in the state (Figure 9).



COMMUTE SHED AND LABOR SHED

According to commuting data from the [U.S. Census Bureau](#), the vast majority – about 81% – of workers who live in the region also work within the region. However, Southwest is a net exporter of labor, having slightly more workers than available jobs. In sum, 135,923 workers both lived and worked in Southwest in 2020, while another 31,250 workers drove into the region for work, compared to 48,829 workers who lived in the region but drove to surrounding counties for work – that number has been increasing over time (Table 7 and Figure 10).

	2020	
	Count	Share
Employed in the Selection Area	167,173	100.0%
Employed in the Selection Area but Living Outside	31,250	18.7%
Employed and Living in the Selection Area	135,923	81.3%
Living in the Selection Area	184,752	100.0%
Living in the Selection Area but Employed Outside	48,829	26.4%
Living and Employed in the Selection Area	135,923	73.6%

Source: [U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap](#)

Home to Mankato, Blue Earth County is the largest regional employment center, and was the biggest draw for workers, followed by Nicollet, Lyon, Brown, Nobles, Martin, and Le Sueur County. Employers in the region both lose and draw workers from the Twin Cities metro area, as well as Minnehaha County in South Dakota, which includes the fast growing city of Sioux Falls. In sum, most workers both live and work in the region, but more workers commute out of the region than commute in (Figure 10).

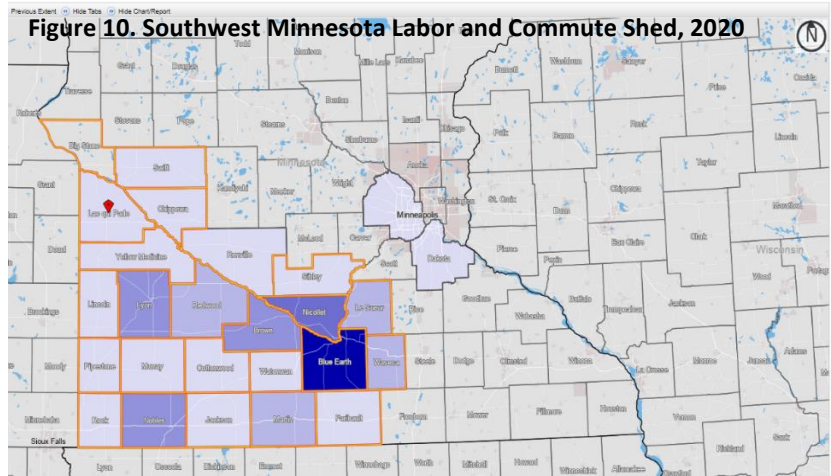
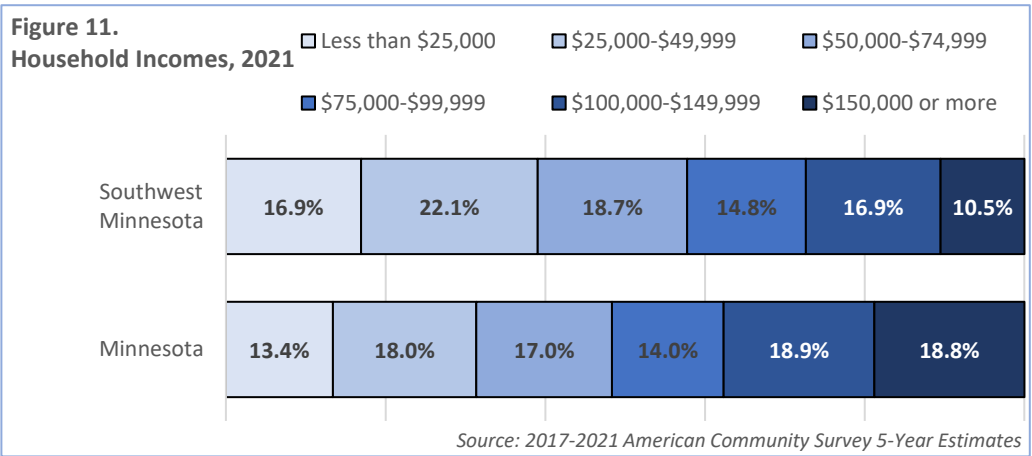


Figure 10. Southwest Minnesota Labor and Commute Shed, 2020

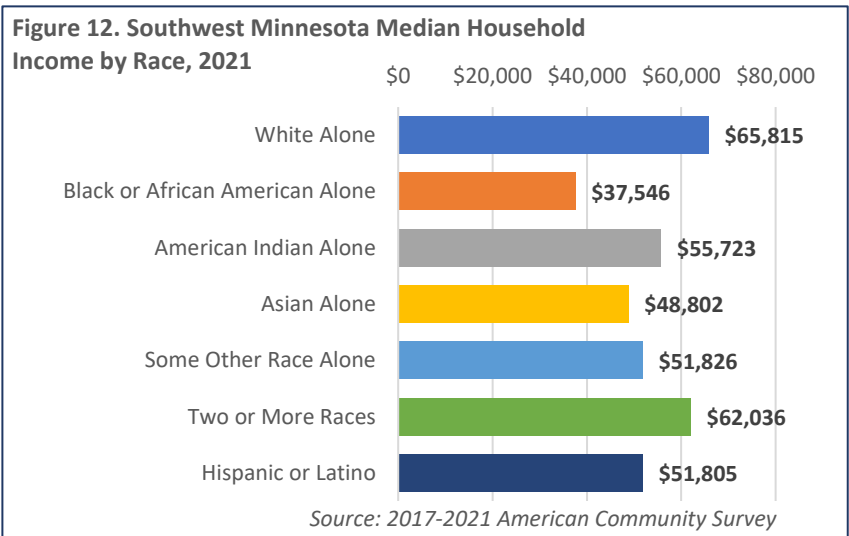
INCOMES, WAGES AND OCCUPATIONS

HOUSEHOLD INCOMES

Household incomes were significantly lower in Southwest Minnesota than the rest of the state. The median household income in Southwest Minnesota was \$64,119 in 2021, compared to \$77,706 in Minnesota. Just under 40% of the households in the region had incomes below \$50,000 in 2021, compared to 31.4% of households statewide. Another 33.6% earned between \$50,000 and \$100,000, and 27.3% earned over \$100,000 per year, compared to 31% and 37.7% statewide, respectively (Figure 11).



Median household incomes varied by race or origin in the region. Black or African American households reported the lowest incomes in Southwest Minnesota, with a median income that was more than \$30,000 lower than for white households. With the exception of households of two or more races, all of the other race and origin groups had median incomes around \$50,000 per year, which was about \$16,000 lower than the median household income for whites (Figure 12).



COST OF LIVING

According to DEED’s [Cost of Living tool](#), the basic needs budget for an average Minnesota family (which consists of 2 adults and 1 child, with 1 full-time and 1 part-time worker) was \$60,720 in 2023. The cost of living for a similar family in Southwest Minnesota was \$47,448 – which was the lowest of the 6 planning regions in the state. The highest monthly costs were for transportation, food, and housing; though the region’s taxes, housing, and child care costs were significantly lower than the rest of the state. In order to meet the basic cost of living for the region, the workers in the family scenario described would need to earn \$15.21 per hour over the course of 60 hours per work week.

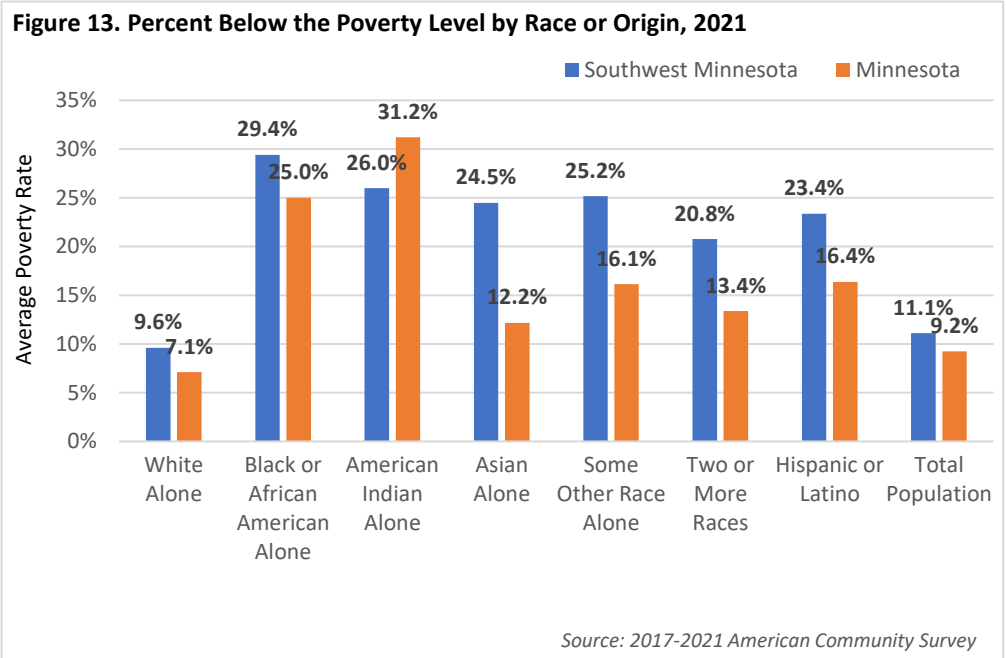
DEED’s Cost of Living tool provides different estimates for household compositions including single people, partnered couples, and up to 4 children. For a single person living alone and working full-time, the estimated yearly cost in Southwest would be \$34,992, which would require an hourly wage of \$16.82 to meet the basic needs standard of living (Table 8). That was also the lowest cost of living in the state.

Table 8. Southwest Minnesota Cost of Living, 2023										
Family Composition	Number of Workers	Yearly Cost of Living	Hourly Wage Required	Monthly Costs						
				Child Care	Food	Health Care	Housing	Transportation	Other	Taxes
Southwest Minnesota										
Single, 0 children	1 FT	\$29,100	\$13.99	\$0	\$397	\$163	\$678	\$720	\$260	\$207
Single, 1 child	1 FT	\$43,224	\$20.78	\$495	\$587	\$449	\$880	\$725	\$355	\$111
2 parents, 1 child	1 FT, 1 PT	\$47,448	\$15.21	\$248	\$908	\$528	\$880	\$838	\$433	\$119
2 parents, 2 children	2 FT	\$63,360	\$15.23	\$746	\$1,184	\$539	\$1,191	\$883	\$575	\$162
State of Minnesota										
Single, 0 children	1 FT	\$34,992	\$16.82	\$0	\$403	\$159	\$961	\$760	\$330	\$303
2 parents, 1 child	1 FT, 1 PT	\$60,720	\$19.46	\$574	\$921	\$555	\$1,216	\$886	\$517	\$391

Source: DEED Cost of Living tool

Overall, Southwest Minnesota’s poverty rate was 11.1%, which was higher than the statewide rate of 9.2%.

Like incomes, poverty levels varied widely by race and origin. It was estimated that just under 30% of the region’s Black or African American population was below the poverty level in 2021, compared to just 9.6% of the white population. Likewise, poverty levels hovered around 26% for American Indians and Asians. Every group of color counted more than a fifth of its members below the poverty threshold. In all cases except for American Indians, the region’s poverty rate was higher than the state’s poverty rate, a reflection of the lower household incomes as noted above (Figure 13).



Source: 2017-2021 American Community Survey

WAGES AND OCCUPATIONS

According to DEED's [Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics](#) program, the median hourly wage for all occupations in Southwest Minnesota was \$22.00 in the first quarter of 2023, which was the second lowest wage level of the six planning regions in the state. Southwest's median wage was \$2.25 below the state's median hourly wage, equaling 91% of the statewide wage rate, and \$3.67 below the median hourly wage in the Twin Cities metro area. At \$20.82, EDR 6W had the lowest median wage in the region, just below EDR 8 at \$21.23, and well below EDR 9 at \$22.61 (Table 9).

Based on location quotient, Southwest Minnesota stands out for having higher concentrations of Farming, Production, Installation, Maintenance, & Repair, Education, Training, and Library, and Transportation & Material Moving workers than the state. The largest occupations in the region include Production, Office and Administrative Support, Transportation & Material Moving, and Sales & Related positions. Not surprisingly, the lowest-paying jobs are concentrated in Food Prep & Serving, Personal Care & Service, Sales & Related, Healthcare Support, and Building, Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance, which tend to have lower educational and training requirements. For the most part, the gap in pay between Southwest Minnesota and the state is also much lower in these jobs (Table 10).

	Median Hourly Wage	Estimated Regional Employment
Central Minnesota	\$22.71	270,260
Twin Cities Metro Area	\$25.67	1,718,290
Northeast Minnesota	\$22.57	136,490
Northwest Minnesota	\$21.67	215,980
Southeast Minnesota	\$23.44	236,590
Southwest Minnesota	\$22.00	167,580
EDR 6W - Upper MN Valley	\$20.82	16,160
EDR 8 - Southwest	\$21.23	51,900
EDR 9 - South Central	\$22.61	99,520
State of Minnesota	\$24.25	2,827,310

Source: [DEED Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics](#)

	Southwest Minnesota				State of Minnesota		
	Median Hourly Wage	Estimated Regional Employment	Share of Total Employment	Location Quotient	Median Hourly Wage	Estimated Statewide Employment	Share of Total Employment
Total, All Occupations	\$22.00	167,580	100.0%	1.0	\$24.25	2,827,310	100.0%
Management	\$43.35	9,240	5.5%	0.8	\$51.58	193,760	6.9%
Business & Financial Operations	\$31.64	6,450	3.8%	0.5	\$38.19	201,940	7.1%
Computer & Mathematical	\$37.64	1,770	1.1%	0.3	\$49.73	99,250	3.5%
Architecture & Engineering	\$36.19	2,330	1.4%	0.7	\$40.60	53,100	1.9%
Life, Physical & Social Science	\$31.10	1,450	0.9%	0.8	\$39.37	29,070	1.0%
Community & Social Service	\$25.25	3,730	2.2%	1.1	\$25.82	54,820	1.9%
Legal	\$34.91	540	0.3%	0.5	\$47.87	18,730	0.7%
Education, Training & Library	\$24.54	11,720	7.0%	1.2	\$24.82	158,830	5.6%
Arts, Design, Entertainment & Media	\$23.57	1,600	1.0%	0.7	\$28.80	37,630	1.3%
Healthcare Practitioners & Technical	\$37.65	9,520	5.7%	0.9	\$41.07	186,700	6.6%
Healthcare Support	\$17.32	9,980	6.0%	1.0	\$17.40	162,400	5.7%
Protective Service	\$26.23	2,190	1.3%	0.9	\$25.83	40,620	1.4%
Food Preparation & Serving Related	\$14.29	13,750	8.2%	1.1	\$14.89	216,970	7.7%
Building, Grounds Cleaning & Maint.	\$17.86	4,870	2.9%	1.1	\$18.26	76,210	2.7%
Personal Care & Service	\$15.52	3,110	1.9%	0.9	\$16.96	58,120	2.1%
Sales & Related	\$16.29	14,590	8.7%	1.0	\$18.14	239,500	8.5%
Office & Administrative Support	\$21.34	19,020	11.3%	0.9	\$23.06	345,830	12.2%
Farming, Fishing & Forestry	\$19.96	620	0.4%	2.6	\$19.84	4,060	0.1%
Construction & Extraction	\$27.54	7,140	4.3%	1.1	\$31.00	113,930	4.0%
Installation, Maintenance & Repair	\$25.34	7,770	4.6%	1.3	\$27.95	98,670	3.5%
Production	\$20.48	20,020	11.9%	1.6	\$22.07	209,380	7.4%
Transportation & Material Moving	\$20.47	16,180	9.7%	1.2	\$21.05	227,780	8.1%

Source: [DEED Occupational Employment Statistics, Qtr. 1 2023](#)

In contrast, the highest paying jobs are found in Management, Healthcare Practitioners, Computer & Mathematical, Architecture & Engineering, Legal, Business & Financial Operations, and Life, Physical, & Social Science occupations, which all need higher levels of education and experience, including many that require postsecondary training. The pay gaps between the region and state are much bigger in these occupations.

JOB VACANCY SURVEY

After reaching a record high in the 4th quarter of 2021, the number of job vacancies dropped in the second quarter of 2022. Employers in Southwest Minnesota reported 14,128 job vacancies in the second quarter of 2022, which was up 2,012 openings compared to the past year. The median hourly wage offer was \$16.55 across all occupations but ranged from a low of around \$12.78 per hour for Personal Care & Service occupations, to about \$31.75 per hour or more for Computer & Mathematical occupations. The median wage offer increased from Q2 2021 by \$1.53.

The largest number of vacancies were in Food Preparation & Serving Related occupations. There were also a lot of openings in Production, Sales, and Healthcare Support occupations. The number of vacancies dropped for Business & Financial Operations, Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, & Media, Healthcare Support, Personal Care & Service, and Transportation and Material Moving Occupations compared to 2021 quarter 2. Overall, about two out of five openings were part-time, 31% required postsecondary education, and 32% required a year or more of experience (Table 11). In sum, educational requirements in the region had been stable or declining over the past 5 years, while work experience requirements were rising.

Table 11. Southwest Minnesota Job Vacancy Survey Results, 2022

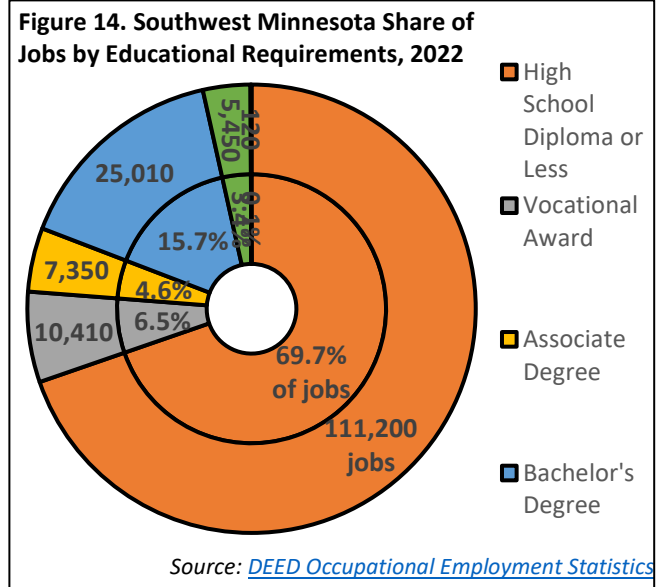
	Number of Total Vacancies	Median Hourly Wage Offer	Percent Part-Time	Percent Temporary or Seasonal	Requiring Postsecondary Education	Requiring 1 or More Years of Work Exp.	Requiring Certificate or License
Total, All Occupations	14,128	\$16.55	42%	16%	31%	32%	37%
Management	430	\$27.04	28%	0%	68%	77%	55%
Business & Financial Operations	151	\$24.64	1%	6%	72%	80%	35%
Computer & Mathematical	99	\$31.77	0%	1%	70%	90%	40%
Architecture & Engineering	130	\$27.09	1%	0%	94%	78%	47%
Life, Physical & Social Sciences	69	\$20.91	1%	1%	42%	84%	50%
Community & Social Service	159	\$25.21	3%	1%	95%	77%	77%
Education, Training & Library	731	\$17.88	34%	24%	86%	92%	80%
Arts, Design, Entertainment & Media	183	\$13.88	36%	65%	19%	59%	12%
Healthcare Practitioners & Technical	1,252	\$25.17	32%	1%	88%	47%	88%
Healthcare Support	1,290	\$14.92	52%	1%	51%	18%	62%
Protective Service	142	\$19.76	43%	6%	68%	78%	93%
Food Preparation & Serving Related	2,626	\$13.56	77%	28%	5%	11%	6%
Building, Grounds Cleaning & Maint.	379	\$15.50	40%	20%	1%	14%	31%
Personal Care & Service	135	\$12.78	80%	21%	5%	9%	14%
Sales & Related	1,467	\$14.33	59%	11%	5%	18%	30%
Office & Administrative Support	766	\$14.07	71%	10%	11%	38%	8%
Construction & Extraction	165	\$17.90	0%	16%	12%	38%	27%
Installation, Maintenance & Repair	554	\$22.90	11%	3%	39%	45%	55%
Production	1,782	\$18.26	9%	24%	12%	19%	4%
Transportation & Material Moving	786	\$17.46	44%	35%	1%	24%	55%

Source: DEED Job Vacancy Survey, 2022

EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Similar to Job Vacancy Survey results, data from DEED’s Occupational Employment Statistics program shows that only about 30% of jobs in the region require postsecondary education for entry. The other 70 percent can be started with a high school diploma or less and some amount of on-the-job training (Figure 14).

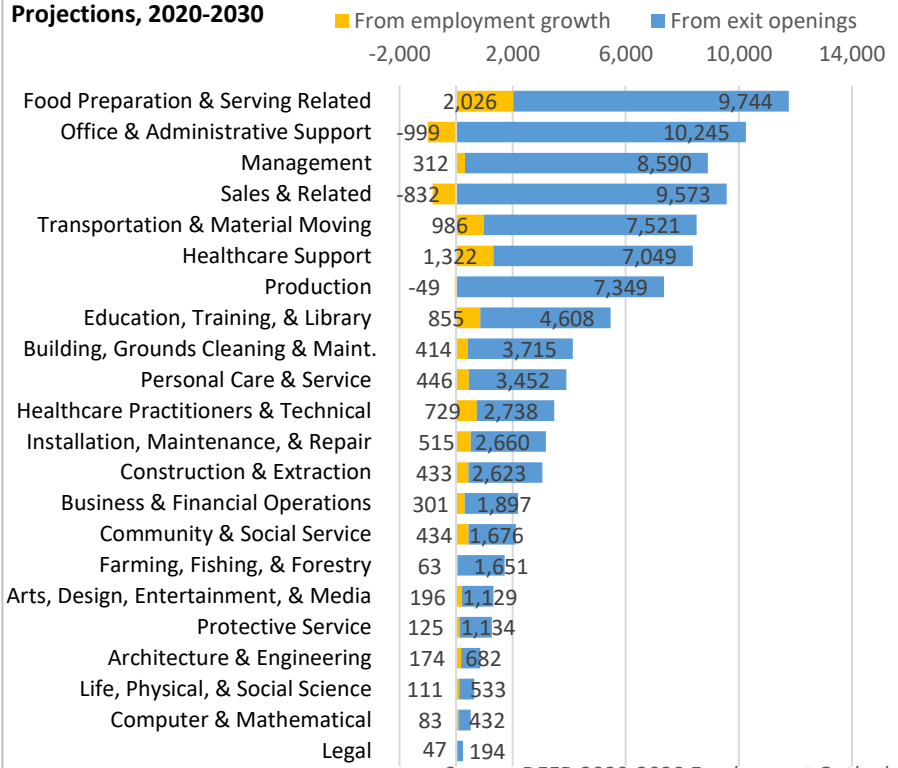
Certain careers – such as dentists, lawyers, and teachers – require a college education, while other jobs – including cost estimators, sales representatives, and correctional officers – do not. College is an excellent way to move up career ladders and open windows of opportunity to fields that would otherwise be closed, such as nursing or engineering. Many of these occupations offer high wages and are in high demand in the marketplace. While education is typically a worthwhile investment, college can be expensive – with average annual expenses ranging between \$20,500 and more than \$53,000 per year in Minnesota¹. For those who go to college, choice of major matters – different programs lead to different jobs that earn different amounts of money.



EMPLOYMENT PROJECTIONS

Overall, the 23-county Southwest Minnesota planning area is projected to grow 3.9% from 2020 to 2030, a gain of 7,692 new jobs. That is the slowest of the 6 planning regions in the state. In addition, the region is also expected to need 89,195 replacement openings to fill jobs left vacant by retirements. Food Prep, Healthcare Support, Transportation & Material Moving, and Education, Training, & Library occupations are expected to see the most new growth – some attributable to the continuing pandemic recovery – but every occupational group will show some future demand either through new jobs or replacement openings (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Southwest Minnesota Regional Employment Projections, 2020-2030



¹ <http://www.ohe.state.mn.us/mPg.cfm?pageID=94>

OCCUPATIONS IN DEMAND

According to DEED's [Occupations in Demand](#) tool, there are well over 200 occupations showing relatively high demand in the region, with training and education requirements ranging from short-term on-the-job training to postsecondary education to advanced degrees. These occupations are spread across different sectors but are also concentrated in the region's major industries. For example, Nursing Assistants, Personal Care Aides, Teachers, Mechanics and Repair workers, and Heavy and Tractor Trailer Truck Drivers are among the top occupations in demand based on the consistent need for workers in these fields. Many of the jobs are concentrated in Manufacturing, Healthcare, Transportation, and other related industries (Table 12).

Table 12. Southwest Minnesota Occupations in Demand, 2022

High School or Less	Vocational Training	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Home Health & Personal Care Aides \$32,800/yr	Nursing Assistants \$38,146/yr	Registered Nurses \$80,694/yr	Substitute Teachers, Short-Term \$46,668/yr
Retail Salespersons \$30,660/yr	Licensed Practical & Licensed Vocational Nurses \$52,242/yr	Police & Sheriff's Patrol Officers \$66,050/yr	General & Operations Managers \$78,383/yr
Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers \$51,299/yr	Automotive Service Technicians & Mechanics \$49,362/yr	Dental Hygienists \$82,983/yr	Elementary School Teachers \$63,391/yr
Cashiers \$29,092/yr	Dental Assistants \$54,422/yr	Clinical Laboratory Technologists & Technicians \$61,801/yr	Secondary School Teachers \$64,067/yr
Fast Food & Counter Workers \$29,393/yr	Machinists \$49,288/yr	Industrial Engineering Technologists & Technicians \$49,646/yr	Accountants & Auditors \$66,142/yr
Waiters & Waitresses \$24,271/yr	Electricians \$63,396/yr	Radiologic Technologists & Technicians \$66,703/yr	Preschool Teachers \$35,451/yr
Laborers & Freight, Stock, & Material Movers, Hand \$39,654/yr	Computer User Support Specialists \$57,870/yr	Computer Network Support Specialists \$72,682/yr	Medical & Health Services Managers \$95,320/yr
Office Clerks, General \$41,160/yr	Medical Assistants \$46,233/yr	Electrical & Electronic Engineering Technologists \$66,192/yr	Industrial Production Managers \$99,559/yr
Maintenance & Repair Workers, General \$49,219/yr	Industrial Machinery Mechanics \$59,803/yr	Civil Engineering Technologists & Technicians \$71,840/yr	Lawyers \$103,321/yr
Teaching Assistants, exc. Postsecondary \$36,756/yr	Farm Equipment Mechanics & Service Technicians \$51,684/yr	Environmental Science & Protection Technicians \$39,218/yr	Personal Financial Advisors \$78,180/yr

Source: DEED [Occupations in Demand](#)

ECONOMY

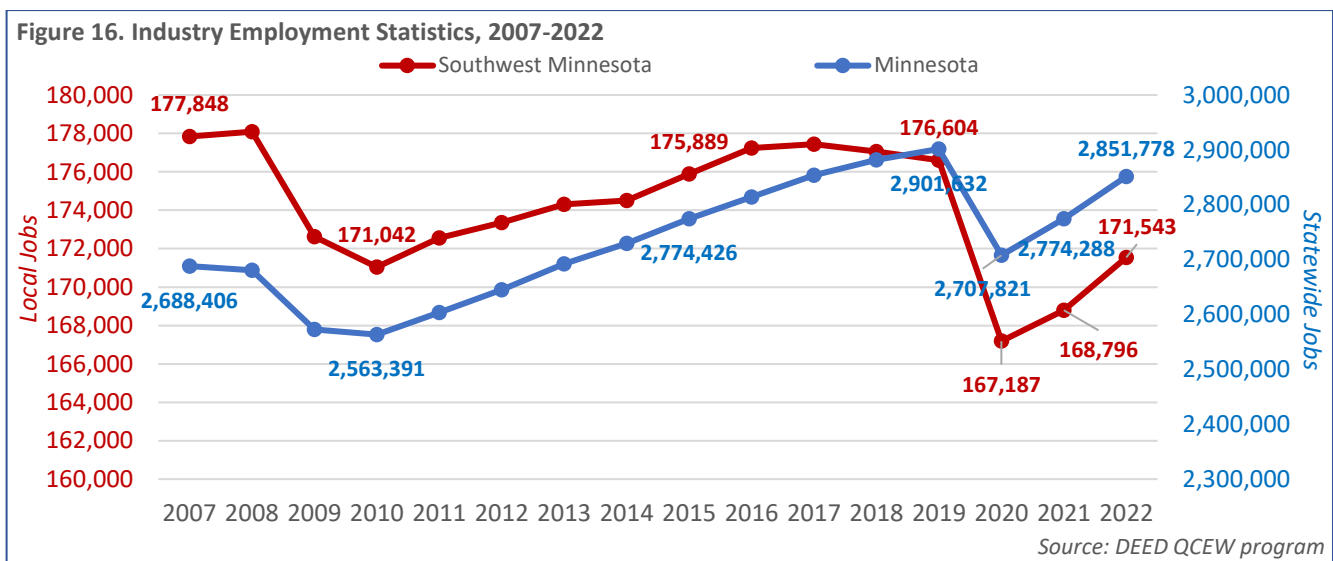
INDUSTRY EMPLOYMENT

According to DEED's [Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages \(QCEW\) program](#), Southwest Minnesota was home to 12,805 business establishments providing an average of 171,543 covered jobs through 2022, with a total payroll of just under \$8.75 billion. That was about 6% of total employment in the state of Minnesota. Average annual wages were \$51,000 in the region, which was nearly \$19,000 lower than the state's average annual wage (Table 13). With 102,120 jobs at 7,098 business establishments, EDR 9 accounts for about 60% of total employment in the Southwest Minnesota planning region. In contrast, EDR 6W had the smallest number of firms and jobs, with 16,417 jobs at 1,604 firms, and suffered the fastest jobs loss over from 2019 to 2022. EDR 8 had 4,103 establishments providing 53,005 jobs in 2022, but experienced the smallest job decline from 2019 to 2022. EDR 9 had the highest average annual wages at \$52,252 though that was still nearly \$17,475 below the state average (Table 13).

Geography	Number of Firms	Number of Jobs	Total Payroll	Average Annual Wage	2021-2022		2019-2022	
					Change in Jobs	Percent Change	Change in Jobs	Percent Change
Southwest Minnesota	12,805	171,543	\$8,748,745	\$51,000	+2,747	+1.6%	-5,061	-2.9%
Region 6W	1,604	16,417	\$797,208	\$48,560	+187	+1.2%	-831	-4.8%
Region 8	4,103	53,005	\$2,615,540	\$49,345	+804	+1.5%	-228	-0.4%
Region 9	7,098	102,120	\$5,335,997	\$52,252	+1,755	+1.7%	-4,002	-3.8%
Minnesota	199,603	2,851,778	\$198,839,399	\$69,725	+77,490	+2.8%	-49,854	-1.7%

Source: DEED Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages (QCEW)

The pandemic recession caused significant job loss in the region, dropping to lower employment levels than suffered during the Great Recession in 2009 and 2010. However, like in the past recession, Southwest Minnesota was less impacted than the state as a whole, and showed a smaller year-over-year decline from 2019 to 2020 than the state. The region lost about -5.3% of employment, compared to a -6.7% decline statewide. Since 2020, the region’s recovery has also been slower than the state’s, adding back only 4,356 of the nearly 9,400 jobs lost (Figure 16).



With 32,109 jobs at 634 firms, Manufacturing is the largest employing industry, accounting for 18.4% of total jobs in the region. Southwest is the only region of the state where Manufacturing is still the largest industry. At \$61,942 in 2022, average annual wages were nearly \$11,000 higher in Manufacturing than the total of all industries. The region has strong concentrations of employment in Food Manufacturing, Machinery Manufacturing, Printing, Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing, and Electrical Equipment Manufacturing.

After several years of growth, the region’s Health Care and Social Assistance industry cut 2,300 jobs over the last three years, but still offered with 29,207 jobs at 1,651 firms. Due to the region’s older population, the largest sector was Nursing & Residential Care Facilities, followed by Hospitals, Ambulatory Health Care Services, and Social Assistance. Retail Trade is the third largest industry, with 19,312 jobs at 1,438 establishments, while Educational Services was the fourth largest, providing 15,472 jobs at 246 establishments. Combined, these four largest industries accounted for 56% of the region’s employment.

Other important industries that are more concentrated in the region include Accommodation & Food Services, Public Administration, Construction, and Wholesale Trade. Fifteen of 20 industries in the region cut jobs over the last three years. However, half of industries added jobs back over the past year, with the largest gains occurring in Manufacturing, Accommodation and Food Services, and Educational Services. Recent job gains were spread across the most impacted industries as well as those that fared relatively well under the effects of the pandemic (Table 14).

Southwest Minnesota	2022 Annual Data				2021-2022		2019-2022	
	Number of Firms	Number of Jobs	Total Payroll (\$1,000s)	Avg. Annual Wage	Change in Jobs	Percent Change	Change in Jobs	Percent Change
Total, All Industries	12,805	171,543	\$8,748,745	\$51,000	+2,747	+1.6%	-5,061	-2.9%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fish & Hunt	718	5,133	\$256,173	\$49,907	-195	-3.7%	-259	-4.8%
Mining	23	210	\$14,484	\$68,973	-11	-5.0%	-109	-34.2%
Construction	1,562	7,924	\$501,659	\$63,309	+36	+0.5%	-366	-4.4%
Manufacturing	634	32,109	\$1,988,895	\$61,942	+1,069	+3.4%	+762	+2.4%
Utilities	77	900	\$89,736	\$99,707	-15	-1.6%	-48	-5.1%
Wholesale Trade	649	7,451	\$581,360	\$78,024	+200	+2.8%	-275	-3.6%
Retail Trade	1,438	19,312	\$597,436	\$30,936	+418	+2.2%	+142	+0.7%
Transportation & Warehousing	780	6,913	\$339,621	\$49,128	-78	-1.1%	-366	-5.0%
Information	201	2,031	\$118,869	\$58,527	-23	-1.1%	-466	-18.7%
Finance & Insurance	714	5,902	\$444,555	\$75,323	-89	-1.5%	+10	+0.2%
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	278	1,372	\$48,273	\$35,185	+68	+5.2%	-55	-3.9%
Professional & Technical Services	608	3,738	\$259,707	\$69,478	+122	+3.4%	-77	-2.0%
Management of Companies	53	1,440	\$143,257	\$99,484	-36	-2.4%	+13	+0.9%
Admin. Support & Waste Mgmt. Svcs.	408	3,890	\$179,150	\$46,054	+182	+4.9%	-149	-3.7%
Educational Services	236	15,472	\$767,766	\$49,623	+322	+2.1%	-626	-3.9%
Health Care & Social Assistance	1,651	29,207	\$1,501,261	\$51,401	-130	-0.4%	-2,362	-7.5%
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	246	1,960	\$41,222	\$21,032	+123	+6.7%	-54	-2.7%
Accommodation & Food Services	848	11,670	\$199,778	\$17,119	+504	+4.5%	-581	-4.7%
Other Services	1,096	4,963	\$165,264	\$33,299	+149	+3.1%	-70	-1.4%
Public Administration	587	9,942	\$510,280	\$51,326	+131	+1.3%	-126	-1.3%

Source: DEED Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages (QCEW) program

INDUSTRY EMPLOYMENT

According to DEED's Quarterly Employment Demographics (QED) program, the workforce in the region was aging over the past 10 years. About one-quarter (24.5%) of workers in the region were 55 years or older, compared to 22.1% statewide and just 21.1% in the region one decade earlier. The percentage of teenaged workers was also rising, along with wages and the number of hours worked as high demand attracted the youngest workers into the workforce (Table 15).

As noted above, wages were climbing across the board for all workers due to rising demand and a tight labor market. While wages were still lowest for the youngest and oldest workers who tend to fill lower-skilled, less-than-full time jobs in industries like Retail Trade and Accommodation & Food Services, people aged 20 to 24 years old enjoyed the fastest percentage increase in wages from 2012 to 2022. Wages were highest for workers between 45 and 64 years of age, and men earned higher wages than women, though the gap was narrowing.

Southwest Minnesota	Percentage of Workers		Percent of Workers, Minnesota		Median Hourly Wage		Median Hours Worked (Per Qtr.)	
	2022	2012	2022	2012	2022	2012	2022	2012
Total, all ages	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	\$20.34	\$13.48	409	403
19 years & under	8.5%	8.1%	6.6%	6.3%	\$13.42	\$7.98	116	113
20 to 24 years	10.6%	12.4%	9.2%	11.3%	\$17.31	\$10.16	275	258
25 to 44 years	40.0%	37.5%	43.6%	42.3%	\$23.19	\$15.09	471	461
45 to 54 years	16.6%	20.9%	18.4%	21.9%	\$25.50	\$16.54	487	480
55 to 64 years	17.2%	16.1%	16.7%	14.7%	\$23.52	\$16.25	483	474
65 years & over	7.3%	5.0%	5.4%	3.5%	\$17.93	\$12.04	229	197
Male	48.4%	47.6%	49.1%	49.1%	\$23.15	\$15.41	475	474
Female	51.6%	52.4%	50.9%	50.9%	\$19.40	\$12.31	368	348

Source: DEED Quarterly Employment Demographics

EMPLOYMENT DIVERSITY

People of color account for 13.9% of the total population in Southwest Minnesota and hold roughly the same share of jobs, compared to the state overall where they amount to 22.5% of the population but only hold 15.2% of jobs. According to data from the Quarterly Workforce Indicator program people of color held 23,323 jobs compared to 146,486 jobs held by white Workers.

The number of jobs held by minorities has more than doubled since 2000 when people of color held 6% of jobs (See Figure 17). People of color have filled an additional 13,150 jobs since 2000 compared to a decline of 14,281 jobs held by White workers. Hispanic/Latino workers hold the largest number of jobs after white workers with 13,342 jobs in 2021, over half of all Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) jobs. The next largest number of jobs held by a BIPOC group was Black or African Americans, holding 4,124 jobs in 2021. The number of jobs held by this group increased by 2,820 since 2000, amounting to a 216% increase. Only Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander employment grew faster (Figure 18).

The Manufacturing, Administrative Support, Agriculture, and Accommodation & Food Services sectors have the highest share of non-White employment at 29%, 22%, 21%, and 19% respectively. The largest numbers of non-White workers are employed by Manufacturing (9,135 jobs), Healthcare & Social Assistance (3,572 jobs), Retail Trade, and Accommodation & Food Services (both 2,274 jobs) (Figure 19).

Figure 17. Employment Share by Race & Ethnicity in Southwest, 2000-2021

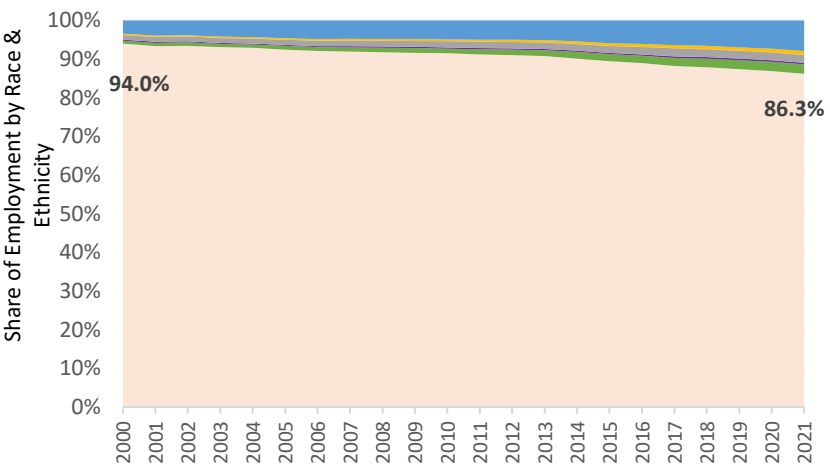


Figure 18. People of Color Employment in Southwest Minnesota, 2000-2021

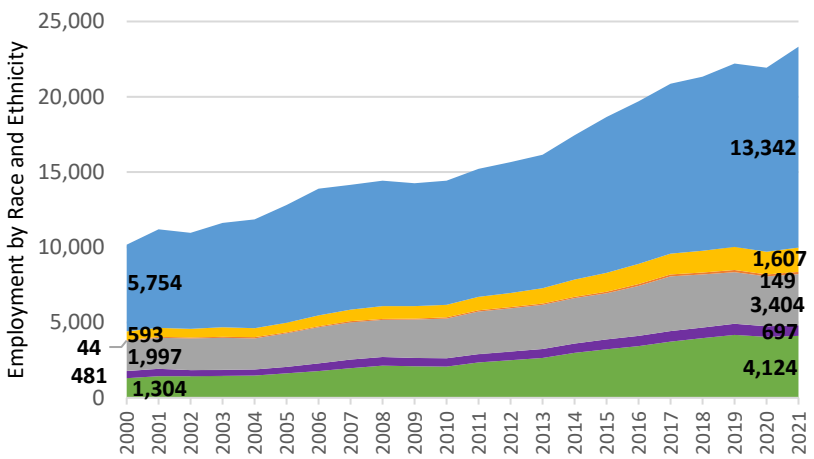
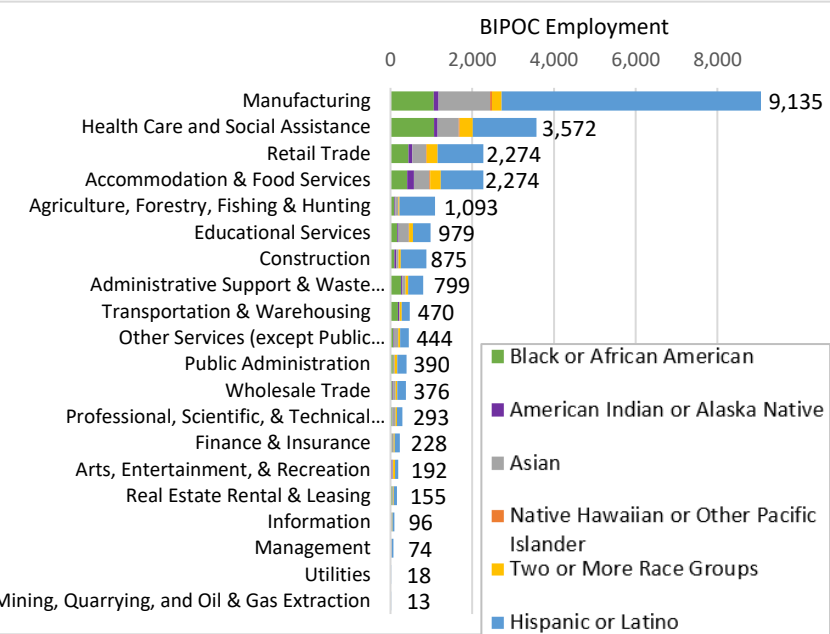


Figure 19. People of Color Employment by Industry in SW Minnesota, 2021



Source: U.S. Census Quarterly Workforce Indicators

INDUSTRY PROJECTIONS

As noted above, Southwest is projected to grow 3.9% from 2020 to 2030, a gain of 7,692 new jobs. Arts, Entertainment & Recreation, Accommodation & Food Services, and Other Services are expected to grow the fastest as the pandemic employment recovery continues. However, these were also the industries hit hardest during the pandemic recession.

Health Care & Social Assistance is projected to add the most new jobs over the next decade and in doing so would surpass Manufacturing as the region's largest industry. Educational Services is also projected to see strong growth and recovery. Real Estate & Rental, Information, and Retail Trade are the only industries projected to lose jobs (Table 16).

Industry	Estimated Employment 2020	Projected Employment 2030	Percent Change 2020-2030	Numeric Change 2020-2030
Total, All Industries	195,812	203,504	+3.9%	+7,692
Health Care & Social Assistance	29,352	32,081	+9.3%	+2,729
Accommodation & Food Services	10,089	12,268	+21.6%	+2,179
Educational Services	15,564	16,274	+4.6%	+710
Other Services	6,756	7,462	+10.4%	+706
Manufacturing	30,107	30,719	+2.0%	+612
Construction	7,573	8,082	+6.7%	+509
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	1,655	2,114	+27.7%	+459
Transportation & Warehousing	7,385	7,817	+5.8%	+432
Public Administration	13,193	13,517	+2.5%	+324
Professional & Technical Services	3,788	4,006	+5.8%	+218
Admin. Support & Waste Mgmt.	3,421	3,636	+6.3%	+215
Finance & Insurance	6,780	6,921	+2.1%	+141
Agriculture, Forestry, Fish & hunt	5,674	5,753	+1.4%	+79
Wholesale Trade	8,045	8,118	+0.9%	+73
Utilities	713	735	+3.1%	+22
Mining	257	273	+6.2%	+16
Management of Companies	1,495	1,506	+0.7%	+11
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	1,318	1,311	-0.5%	-7
Information	2,152	2,001	-7.0%	-151
Retail Trade	18,569	17,653	-4.9%	-916

Source: DEED 2020-2030 Employment Outlook

NONEMPLOYER ESTABLISHMENTS

Southwest Minnesota was home to 26,918 self-employed businesses or "nonemployers" in 2019, which are defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as "businesses without paid employees that are subject to federal income tax, originating from tax return information of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS)." Southwest Minnesota saw a small decline in nonemployers over the past decade. In sum, the region lost 307 nonemployers from 2009 to 2019, a -1.1% decrease. In sum, these nonemployers generated sales receipts of over \$1.3 billion in 2019 (Table 17).

	2019		2009-2019	
	Number of Firms	Receipts (\$1,000s)	Change in Firms	Percent Change
Southwest Minnesota	26,918	\$1,300,424	-307	-1.1%
Region 6W	3,280	\$149,065	-161	-4.7%
Region 8	8,306	\$405,837	-110	-1.3%
Region 9	15,332	\$745,522	-36	-0.2%
Minnesota	418,080	\$20,377,253	+39,926	+10.6%

Source: U.S. Census, Nonemployer Statistics program

CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

Like other parts of Greater Minnesota, agriculture is also a key industry in Southwest Minnesota, including 18,319 farms producing just under \$7.8 billion in the market value of products sold in 2017 according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Several of the highest ranked agriculture counties in the state are in Southwest Minnesota, including Martin (#2), Nobles (#4), Blue Earth (#5), Redwood (#6), and Rock (#9). Like the state, the number of farms in the region declined over the past 5 years, but Southwest Minnesota still accounts for 26.6 percent of the farms in the state (Table 18).

	Number of Farms	Market Value of Products Sold	State Rank
Southwest Minnesota	18,319	\$7,758,272,000	1
Region 6W	3,526	\$1,185,918,000	8
Region 8	7,287	\$3,350,135,000	1
Region 9	7,506	\$3,222,219,000	2
Minnesota	68,822	\$18,395,390,000	

Source: 2017 Census of Agriculture

Upon request, this information can be made available in alternate formats by contacting Luke Greiner at 320-223-6992 or at luke.greiner@state.mn.us or Amanda O'Connell at 320-441-6571 or at amanda.oconnell@state.mn.us

South Central Demand Occupations 2024

(July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025)

Medical	
29-1141.00	Registered Nurses
31-1120.00	Home Health and Personal Care Aides
31-1131.00	Nursing Assistants
31-9092.00	Medical Assistants
29-2061.00	Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses
31-9091.00	Dental Assistants
29-1292.00	Dental Hygienists
29-2042.00	Emergency Medical Technicians (Paramedics)
29-2052.00	Pharmacy Technicians
29-2010.00	Clinical Laboratory Technologists and Technicians
11-9111.00	Medical and Health Service Managers
43-6013.00	Medical Secretaries & Administrative Assistants
29-2055.00	Surgical Technologists and Technicians

Service	
21-1093.00	Social and Human Service Assistants
21-1011.00	Substance Abuse, Behavior and Mental Health Counselor
21-1023.00	Mental Health and Substance Abuse Social Workers
21-1021.00	Child, Family, and School Social Workers
33-3012.00	Correctional Officers and Jailers
33-3051.00	Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers
35-2021.00	Food Preparation Workers
35-2014.00	Cooks, Restaurant
37-2011.00	Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeepers
37-2012.00	Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners
37-3011.00	Landscaping and Groundskeeping
39-9011.00	Childcare Workers
43-5071.00	Shipping, Receiving, and Inventory Clerk
43-4051.00	Customer Service Representatives
43-4171.00	Receptionists
43-6014.00	Secretaries/Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical & Executive
43-9061.00	Office Clerks, General
43-1011.00	First-Line Supervisors of Office/Administrative Support Workers
49-9071.00	Maintenance and Repair Workers
53-7065.00	Stockers and Order Fillers

Business & Finances	
13-2072.00	Loan Officers
13-1071.00	Human Resources Specialists
11-1021.00	General and Operations Manager
13-1199.00	Business Operation Specialists
13-2011.00	Accountants and Auditors
43-3031.00	Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks
11-3031.00	Financial Managers
41-2011.00	Cashiers
41-1011.00	First Line Supervisors of Retail Workers
41-2031.00	Retail Salespersons
41-4012.00	Sales Representatives, Wholesale & Manufacturing
41.3091.00	Sales Representatives, Services
41-2022.00	Parts Salesperson
13-1161.00	Marketing Research Analyst and Marketing Specialist

Computers	
15-1256.00	Software Developers & Software Quality Assurance Analysts/Testers
15-1232.00	Computer User Support Specialists

Education	
25-9045.00	Teachers Assistants, Except Postsecondary
25-2031.00	Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and CTE
25-2058.00	Special Education Teachers, Secondary School
25-2052.00	Special Education Teachers, Kindergarten & Elementary School
25-2021.00	Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Ed.
25-2022.00	Middle School Teachers, Except Special and CTE
25-2011.00	Preschool Teachers, Except Special Ed.

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South Central Demand Occupations 2024

(July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025)

Trades	
47-2031.00	Carpenters
47-2152.00	Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters
47-2061.00	Construction Laborers
47-1011.00	First-Line Supervisors of Construction Trades & Extraction Workers
47-2111.00	Electricians
47-2073.00	Operating Engineers
49-9021.00	Heating, Air Conditioning, & Refrigeration Mechanics/Installers
49-3023.00	Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics
49-3031.00	Bus and Truck Mechanics and Diesel Engine Specialists
49-9041.00	Industrial Machinery Mechanics (Mechatronics)
49-1011.00	First Line Supervisors of Mechanics and Installers
49-3041.00	Farm Equipment Mechanics & Service Technicians
51-4041.00	Machinists
51-4121.00	Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers
47-4051.00	Highway Maintenance Workers

Manufacturing	
11-3051.00	Industrial Production Managers
51-1011.00	First Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers
51-2090.00	Miscellaneous Assemblers & Fabricators
51-9199.00	Production Workers
51-9061.00	Inspectors, Testers, Sorters, Samplers, & Weighers
51-9161.00	Computer Numerically Controlled Tool Operators
51-4031.00	Cutting, Punching, Press Machine Setters, Operators, Tenders
51-9111.00	Packaging, Filling Machine Operators and Tenders
51-9124.00	Coating, Painting, and Spraying Machine Setters, Operators, Tenders
53-7064.00	Packers and Packers, Hand
53-7062.00	Laborers, Freight, Stock, and Material Movers

Engineers/Technicians	
17-3027.00	Mechanical Engineering Technologists & Technicians
17-3026.00	Industrial Engineering Technologists & Technicians
17-3022.00	Civil Engineering Technologists & Technicians
17-3023.00	Electrical & Electronic Engineering Technologists & Technicians

Agriculture	
45-2093.00	Farm Workers, Farm, Ranch Aquacultural Animals
45-2092.00	Farm Workers & Laborers, Crop, Nursery & Greenery
45-2091.00	Ag Equipment Operators
45-1011.00	First Line Supervisor of Farming, Fishing and Forestry Workers

Transportation	
53-3051.00	Bus Drivers, School
53-3032.00	Heavy & Tractor Trailer Truck Drivers
53-3033.00	Light Truck or Delivery Service Drivers
53-7051.00	Industrial Truck and Tractor Operators
53-7062.00	Laborers & Freight Stock, and Materials Movers
11-3071.00	Transportation Storage and Distribution Managers
53-1049.00	First Line Supervisor of Transportation and Material Moving Workers

Updated 2/15/2024

	Blue Earth	Brown	Faribault	LeSueur	Martin	Nicollet	Sibley	Waseca	Watsonwan
Agriculture	Ashley Leivermann Crystal Valley								
Construction /Trades	Jon Nowak Regional Council of Carpenters Stacey Karels Laborers								
Business/Professional Services	Ann Miller Spherion								
Health Care/Social Assistance	Rachel Evers Ecumen Rena Wolf Mayo				Deb Barnes Lakeview Health Services				
Manufacturing	Val Bentsdahl Jones Metal Nicole Raelyn Dotson Iron Casting Karla Balbuena Associated Finishing					Brent Christopherson Taylor Corporation Lauren Oliver Coloplast		Tim Wenzel Winegar Inc	
Education & Social Services, Public Admin.	Christine Olson Voc. Rehab. Serv. Amanda Mackie MVAC Deann Boney Mn Prairie County Alliance Jim Hanson South Central College Alejandra Bejarano Region 9			Nate Warden ABE	Mary Shumski Job Service			Andrea Montemeyer MET, Inc.	
Transportation/Warehousing									